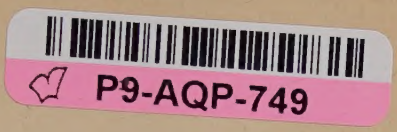
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America's Coming-of-Age

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A Biographical Study

America's Coming-of-Age

By Van Wyck Brooks

"The middle of humanity thou never
knewest, but the extremity of both ends."
TIMON OF ATHENS.

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To John Hall Wheelock

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"Highbrow" and "Lowbrow"

I

"HIGHBROW" AND "LOWBROW"

I

At the time when he was trying to release humanity from the cross of gold on which, as he said, it was crucified, the Apostle of Free Silver — in this matter, at least, representing the old American frame of mind — announced that the opinion of all the professors in the United States would not affect his opinions in the least. Now this, plainly, was a very formidable dilemma. For on the one hand stood a body of supposed experts in economic theory, on the other a man whose profession it was to change and reform economic practice,— the one knowing, the other doing; and not only was there no compatibility between them but an openly avowed and cynical contempt of theory on the part

of practice was a principal element in the popularity of a popular hero. Was Mr. Bryan, however, to blame for it? To know anything of the economic theory which is taught in American universities — in many cases compulsorily taught — is to confess that blame is not the right word. For this economic theory is at the least equally cynical. It revolves round and round in its tree-top dream of the economic man; and no matter how much the wind blows political economy never comes down. Incompatibility, mutual contempt between theory and practice, is in the very nature of things.

One might extend the illustration to literature, merely substituting one professor for another and putting any typical best-selling novelist in the place of Mr. Bryan. It is a peculiar twist in the academic mind to suppose that a writer belongs to literature only when he is dead; living he is, vaguely, something else; and an habitual remoteness from the creative mood has made American professors quite peculiarly academic. "Litera-

ture," as distinguished from excellent writing, is, in the American universities, a thing felt to have been done, and while for all one knows it may continue to be done the quality in it which makes it literature only comes out, like the quality in wines, with age.

Now I suppose that most of the American novelists in our day are university men; they have learned to regard literature as an august compound of Browning, Ben Jonson, and Hesiod; and consequently when they themselves begin to write it is in a spirit of real humility that they set themselves to the composition of richly rewarded trash. I am sure of this: it is modesty that lies behind the "best-seller"; and there is an aspect in which the spectacle of writers regarding themselves as humble tradesfolk has a certain charm. But the conception of literature as something, so to speak, high and dry, gives to the craft of authorship in America a latitude like that of morality in Catholic countries: so long as the heavenly virtues are upheld mundane virtues may shift as they will. In a word,

writers are relieved of responsibility, and while their ethical conscience remains quite sound they absolve themselves from any artistic conscience whatsoever. And the worst of it is that precisely these writers of immitigable trash are often the bright, vigorous, intuitive souls who *could* make literature out of American life. Has it ever been considered how great a knowledge of men, what psychological gifts of the first order their incomparable achievement of popularity implies?

These two attitudes of mind have been phrased once for all in our vernacular as "Highbrow" and "Lowbrow." I have proposed these terms to a Russian, an Englishman, and a German, asking each in turn whether in his country there was anything to correspond with the conceptions implied in them. In each case they have been returned to me as quite American, authentically our very own, and, I should add, highly suggestive.

What side of American life is not touched

by this antithesis? What explanation of American life is more central or more illuminating? In everything one finds this frank acceptance of twin values which are not expected to have anything in common: on the one hand a quite unclouded, quite unhypocritical assumption of transcendent theory ("high ideals"); on the other a simultaneous acceptance of catchpenny realities. Between university ethics and business ethics, between American culture and American humor, between Good Government and Tammany, between academic pedantry and pavement slang, there is no community, no genial middle ground.

The very accent of the words "Highbrow" and "Lowbrow" implies an instinctive perception that this is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs. For both are used in a derogatory sense. The "Highbrow" is the superior person whose virtue is admitted but felt to be an inept unpalatable virtue; while the "Lowbrow" is a good fellow one readily takes to, but with a certain scorn for him

and all his works. And what is true of them as personal types is true of what they stand for. They are equally undesirable, and they are incompatible; but they divide American life between them.

II

They always have divided American life between them; and to understand them one has to go back to the beginning of things,—for without doubt the Puritan Theocracy is the all-influential fact in the history of the American mind. It was the Puritan conception of the Deity as not alone all-determining but precisely responsible for the practical affairs of the race, as constituting, in fact, the State itself, which precluded in advance any central bond, any responsibility, any common feeling in American affairs and which justified the unlimited centrifugal expediency which has always marked American life. And the same instinct that made against centrality in government made against centrality in thought, against common standards of any

kind. The imminent eternal issues the Puritans felt so keenly, the equally imminent practical issues they experienced so monotonously threw almost no light on one another; there was no middle ground between to mitigate, combine, or harmonize them.

So it is that from the beginning we find two main currents in the American mind running side by side but rarely mingling — a current of overtones and a current of undertones — and both equally unsocial: on the one hand, the current of Transcendentalism, originating in the piety of the Puritans, becoming a philosophy in Jonathan Edwards, passing through Emerson, producing the fastidious refinement and aloofness of the chief American writers, and, as the coherent ideals and beliefs of Transcendentalism gradually faded out, resulting in the final unreality of most contemporary American culture; and on the other hand the current of catchpenny opportunism, originating in the practical shifts of Puritan life, becoming a philosophy in Franklin, passing through the American hu-

morists, and resulting in the atmosphere of contemporary business life.

Thus the literature of the seventeenth century in America is composed in equal parts, one may fairly say, of piety and advertisement; and the revered chronicles of New England had the double effect of proving how many pilgrim souls had been elected to salvation and of populating with hopeful immigrants a land where heaven had proved so indulgent.

For three generations the prevailing American character was compact in one type, the man of action who was also the man of God. Not until the eighteenth century did the rift appear and with it the essential distinction between "Highbrow" and "Lowbrow." It appeared in the two philosophers, Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin, who share the eighteenth century between them. In their amazing purity of type and in the apparent incompatibility of their aims they determined the American character as a racial fact, and after them the Revolution

became inevitable. Channing, Lincoln, Emerson, Whitman, Grant, Webster, Garrison, Edison, Mr. Rockefeller, Mrs. Eddy are all, in one way or another, permutations and combinations of these two grand progenitors of the American character.

Strange that at the very outset two men should have arisen so aptly side by side and fixed the poles of our national life! For no one has ever more fully and typically than Jonathan Edwards displayed the infinite inflexibility of the upper levels of the American mind, nor any one more typically than Franklin the infinite flexibility of its lower levels.

The intellect of Jonathan Edwards was like the Matterhorn, steep, icy, and pinnacled. At its base were green slopes and singing valleys filled with all sorts of little tender wild-flowers — for he was the most lovable of men; but as soon as the ground began to rise in good earnest all this verdurous life came to an abrupt end: not one green or living thing could subsist in that frozen soil, on those pale heights. It was the solitude of

logic that led him to see in destiny only a wrathful tyrant and a viper's trail in the mischievous ways of little boys and girls.

I confess to an old-time and so to speak aboriginal affection for this man, so gently solicitous to make up in his daily walk and conversation for the ferocious impulsions of that brain of his. He was even the most romantic of men, as I thought once, and I well remember that immense old musty book of his theology, covered with mildew, with its desert of tiny print, which I carried out with me into the fields and read, in the intervals of birdnesting, under the hedgerows and along the borders of the wood: the sun fell for the first time on those clammy old pages and the pallid thoughts that lay in them, and the field-sparrows all about were twittering in a language which, to tell the truth, was no more unintelligible to me. But everything that springs from solitude shines by a light of its own, and Manfred among the Alps was not more lonely than this rapt scholar in his parsonage among the Indians.

There are, however, solitudes and solitudes. Great poets and fruitful thinkers live apart themselves, perhaps, but they have society and the ways of men in their blood. They recollect in tranquillity, as it were, gestate, live again, and reveal the last significance of active generations rich in human stuff, in experience, in emotion, in common reason. Nothing like this existed in the background of Jonathan Edwards, no profound and complex race-life. Intellect in him, isolated and not responsible to the other faculties, went on its way unchecked; and he was able to spin those inept sublimities of his by subtracting from his mind every trace of experience, every touch of human nature as it really was among his innocent country-folk.

Notoriously, of course, our great Dr. Franklin simplified existence in precisely the opposite way; for the opposite of unmitigated theory is unmitigated practice. Who can deny that in *Poor Richard* the "Lowbrow" point of view for the first time took definite shape, stayed itself with ax-

ioms, and found a sanction in the idea of "policy"? It emerges there full-fledged, in its classical form, a two-dimensional wisdom, a wisdom shorn of overtones, the most accommodating wisdom in the world.

Were ever two views of life more incompatible than these? What indeed could Poor Richard have in common with an Angry God?

And what can Mr. Bryan have in common with political economy?

III

"Our people," said Emerson, "have their intellectual culture from one country and their duties from another." In how many spheres that phrase can be applied! Desiccated culture at one end and stark utility at the other have created a deadlock in the American mind, and all our life drifts chaotically between the two extremes. Consider, for example, our use of the English language. Literary English in England is naturally a living speech, which occupies the middle of

the field and expresses the flesh and blood of an evolving race. Literary English with us is a tradition, just as Anglo-Saxon law with us is a tradition. They persist not as the normal expressions of a race, the essential fibre of which is permanently Anglo-Saxon, but through prestige and precedent and the will and habit of a dominating class largely out of touch with a national fabric unconsciously taking form "out of school." No wonder that our literary style is "pure," that our literary tradition, our tradition especially in oratory and political prose, retains the spirit of the eighteenth century. But at what a cost! At the cost of expressing a popular life which bubbles with energy and spreads and grows and slips away ever more and more from the control of tested ideas, a popular life "with the lid off," which demands an intellectual outlet and finds one in slang, journalism, and unmannerly fiction.

After seventy years Carlyle's well-known appeal to Emerson still applies to the spirit

of American culture: "For the rest, I have to object still (what you will call objecting against the Law of Nature) that we find you a speaker indeed, but as it were a *Soliloquizer* on the eternal mountain-tops only, in vast solitudes where men and their affairs lie all hushed in a very dim remoteness; and only *the man* and the stars and the earth are visible — whom, so fine a fellow seems he, we could perpetually punch into, and say, 'Why won't you come and help us then? We have terrible need of one man like you down among us! It is cold and vacant up there; nothing paintable but rainbows and emotions; come down and you shall do life-pictures, passions, facts. . . .'"

And what a comment on the same utterance that at this very moment an amiable New Englander should have been painting in Parson Wilbur and Hosea Biglow, respectively, unconscious of any tragic symbolism of things to come, the unbridgeable chasm between literate and illiterate America! Morally, no doubt, in Jaalam, they understood

one another and got along very well, as Yankees will. But in Chicago?

IV

To pass now from the social to the personal question, since the question is at bottom a personal one, let us figure to ourselves how this divergence comes about and how it is that our educational system, instead of creating what President Eliot calls a "serviceable fellowship" between theory and practice, tends to set them apart and to confirm us all either in the one extreme or in the other.

Let us figure to ourselves a typical American who has grown up, as an American typically does grow up, in a sort of orgy of lofty examples, moralized poems, national anthems, and baccalaureate sermons; until he is charged with all manner of ideal purities, ideal honorabilities, ideal femininities, flag-wavings and skyscrapings of every sort; — until he comes to feel in himself the hovering presence of all manner of fine potentialities,

remote, vaporous, and evanescent as a rainbow. All this time, it can fairly be said, he has not been taught to associate himself personally with ends even much lower than these, he has not been taught that life is a legitimate progress toward spiritual or intellectual ends at all, his instincts of acquisition, pleasure, enterprise, and desire have in no way been linked and connected with disinterested ends; he has had it very firmly embedded in his mind that the getting of a living is not a necessity incidental to some higher and more disinterested end, but that it is the prime and central end in things, and as a corollary to this he has been encouraged to assume that the world is a stamping-ground for every untrained, greedy, and aggressive impulse in him, that, in short, society is fair prey for what he can get out of it.

Let us imagine that, having grown up in this way, he is sent to college. And here, in order to keep the case a typical one, we shall have to exercise a little discrimination in the choice of a university.

It will not be Harvard, because the ideal of Harvard, as I shall point out, is not a typically modern American ideal. Nor will it be one of the modern utilitarian universities, which have no ideal at all. It will be any one of the others; and when I say this I mean that each of the others is in one way or another a development of the old American country college; its ideal, its experience, its tradition spring out of and lead one back to that. Now among these old colleges Harvard might have been figured as an ever-developing, ever-liberalizing catholicism, of which they were all sectarian offshoots, established on a principle of progressive theological fragmentation, each one defending an orthodoxy its predecessors had outworn or violently setting up in defense of some private orthodoxy of its own. They founded themselves each on a remote dogma or system of dogma as their central and sufficient basis, and all their wheels turned in relation to the central theological dynamo. In a sense of course this was true also of

Harvard, but with a marked difference. For the theologians who founded Harvard were men of action as well; in the seventeenth century a New England minister was also a politician, and the education of ministers for which Harvard was mainly established implied an education for public affairs as well, an education for society, so far as the word society can be used in connection with the early Puritans at all. Thus at the outset the founders of Harvard drove in the wedge of secularism: Harvard had from the beginning a sort of national basis, at least among New Englanders, and its dogmatic structure consequently reflected and shifted with and accommodated itself to the currents of national thought. Remaining in touch with society, it educated to a certain extent, relatively to an extraordinary extent, the social function of its students; and it is thus no accident that so large a proportion of the political, the literary, and the scientific life of America has sprung from it. But in the eighteenth century the conditions under

which Harvard was established had ceased to be true. The minister was no longer a man of affairs,— he was a stark theologian, and usually of a type which the majority of his flock had outgrown. Yale, Princeton, and virtually all the other typically American colleges were founded by men of this type. Jonathan Edwards may figure for them all; the motive which led him to become the president of Princeton being precisely that his flock in Connecticut could no longer see the anger of God eye to eye with him. Already in his time the fathers and mothers of young America had submitted to the charms of *Poor Richard's Almanac* — they had themselves for the most part become inveterately "Lowbrow"; but they seem to have believed that an Angry God might still be a good influence over young America himself.

To return now to the typical case with whom we began, let us imagine that he makes a typical choice and goes to a typical university. Having arrived there will he be confronted with an Angry God, or any sort

of direct theological dogma? By no means. But there will have remained in the air a certain fragrance and vibration, as if an ideal had passed that way and not stayed, there will be intangible whispers and seductions, there will be a certain faint, rarified, remote, but curiously pervasive and insistent influence — like the sound of an Æolian harp or the recollection of Plato in some uncouth slum; there will be memories and portraits of many an old metaphysician, white, unearthly, fragile. It will all seem very much as if, the significance of these remote dogmas having evaporated, only the remoteness, in a way, had remained.

One would have to be very insensitive not to feel the quite unbalancing charm of this quality — so different from its comparatively robust Oxford parallel — in the old New England colleges, as in Princeton, Yale, and the other universities which have developed out of them; but one cannot help feeling also, I think, something vaguely Circean in it. And in fact, given the preliminary method of

bringing up which I have sketched, what will be its effect in the case we are considering? Suddenly confronted during four years with just this remote influence of ideals, out of which the intellectual structure has evaporated and which never possessed a social structure, will he not find them too vague, too intangible, too unprepared for to be incorporated into his nature? Certainly ideals of this kind, in this way presented, in this way prepared for, cannot enrich life, because they are wanting in all the elements of personal contact. Wholly dreamlike and vaporous, they end by breeding nothing but cynicism and chagrin; and in becoming permanently catalogued in the mind as impracticable they lead to a belief in the essential unreality of ideas as well.

Indeed there is nothing so tragic and so ominous as the familiar saying that college is the happiest time of one's life. Yet perhaps a majority of college men think of their college life in this way. They deliberately put their Golden Age behind them — and, as things are, they know it is behind them. But

consider what a comment this is on the American university itself,— a place, one can fairly say, where ideals are cherished precisely because they are ineffectual, because they are ineptly and mournfully beautiful, because they make one cynical, because they make life progressively uninteresting, because, practically and in effect, they are illusions and frauds and infinitely charming lies. There surely is the last and the most impenetrable stronghold of Puritanism, refined to the last degree of intangibility, which persists in making the world a world inevitably sordid, basely practical, and whose very definition of the ideal consequently is, that which has no connection with the world!

Thus far then for our typical university graduate. He has been consistently educated in twin values which are incompatible. The theoretical atmosphere in which he has lived is one that bears no relation to society, the practical atmosphere in which he has lived bears no relation to ideals. Theory has become for him permanently a world in

itself, a kind of *ding an sich;* practice has become simply a world of dollars. »

Now supposing he has already become interested in the study, let us say, of economics, three paths are open to him: either he can give himself once for all to economics, or he can go the way of all flesh, i.e., into business, or he can hesitate between the two, becoming an economist for the time being and eventually going into business.

It is just here, at the moment of choice, that the want of ballast in his education becomes manifest. There is nothing for him but to lurch violently to the one extreme or the other; and this, according as there is in his nature a crude preponderance either of intellect or of the sense of action, he does. If he is preponderantly intellectual he adopts the first course; that is to say, he dedicates himself to the service of a type of economic theory that bears no relation to this wicked world at all, leaving all the good people who are managing the economic practice of society (and, for the want of him, chiefly mud-

dling it) — leaving all these good people to talk nonsense in the wilderness. If he is preponderantly a man of action, he adopts the second course; that is to say, he dedicates himself to the service of a private end which knows nothing of theory, which is most cynically contemptuous of ideals, flatulent or other, and which is precisely as indifferent to the economic life of society as the professor of economics himself.

Well, good riddance to both of them, one might be inclined to say, except that on second thought the professor and the business man between them hold in their hands so great a part of human destiny. It is the third case that is really interesting and really tragic. For just so far as our typical student is a normal man, just so far as he shares the twin elements of intellect and action in equal parts, just so far will he be on the fence. The probability is that in this case he will become a professor for as long as he can stand it and then burst into business and become a first-rate millionaire as quickly as possible.

The sense of action in him will rebel against the sense of theory and finding in theory no basis for action, no relation to action, will press him into a fresh life where the theoretical side of his nature will at least be of some slight use in furthering his own aggrandizement, and that alone.

V

Naturally the question of economics is only typical. Any branch of human activity which is represented by professors at all — and which is not? — would serve as well. Human nature itself in America exists on two irreconcilable planes, the plane of stark theory and the plane of stark business; and in the back of its mind is heaven knows what world of poetry, hidden away, too inaccessible, too intangible, too unreal in fact ever to be brought into the open, or to serve, as the poetry of life rightly should serve, in harnessing thought and action together, turning life into a disinterested adventure.

Argue which way you will, from the indi-

vidual to society or from society to the individual, it is the same. Just as the American attitude toward the State has been the attitude of an oratorical and vague patriotism which has not based itself on a concrete interest in public affairs; just as, in consequence of this, the "invisible government" of business has swept in and taken possession of the field and become the actual government under which we live, overgrowing and supplanting the government we recognize: so also in the case of the individual; the cherishing of ideals that are simply unmapped regions to which nobody has the least intention of building roads, the baccalaureate sermons that are no just, organic comment on the educational system that precedes them — precisely these themselves strengthen the forces from below; the invisible government of self-interest, built up carefully from the beginning by maxim and example, fills the vacuum a disinterested purpose ought to have occupied.

Twenty, even ten years, ago, it would

have been universally assumed that the only hope for American society lay in somehow lifting the "Lowbrow" elements in it to the level of the "Highbrow" elements. But that quickening realism which belongs to contemporary thought makes it plain on the one hand that the mere idealism of university ethics, the mere loftiness of what is called culture, the mere purity of so-called Good Government, left to themselves, not only produce a glassy inflexible priggishness on the upper levels which paralyzes life; but that the lower levels have a certain humanity, flexibility, tangibility which are indispensable in any programme: that Tammany has quite as much to teach Good Government as Good Government has to teach Tammany, that slang has quite as much in store for so-called culture as culture has for slang — that the universities, while emphatically not becoming more "practical," must base their disinterestedness on human, moral, social, artistic, and personal needs, impulses, and experience.

But society cannot become humane of itself; and it is for this reason that the movements of Reform are so external and so superficial. The will to reform springs from a conviction *ex post facto*, and is strictly analogous to the frame of mind of business men who retire at sixty and collect pictures. Nothing so exemplifies it as the spectacle of Mr. Carnegie spending three quarters of his life in providing steel for battleships and the last quarter of it in trying to abolish war. He himself surely has not been conscious of any inward revolution; plainly with him as with others the will to create disorder and the will to reform it spring from the same inner condition of mind. The impetus of Reform is evidently derived from the hope that a sufficient number of reformers can be trained and brought into the field to match the forces of business — the one group cancelling the other group. The ideal of Reform, in short, is the attainment of zero.

Nothing is more absurd than to attack business as such. But the motives and cir-

cumstances of business vary from age to age, and there is a world of difference between industry conceived as a social process and trade conceived as a private end. A familiar distinction between the nineteenth century and the twentieth is that the problem of civilization is no longer the problem of want but the problem of surplus. Roughly speaking, the hereditary American class — the prevailing class, I mean — is faced with the problem not of making money but of spending it; the prevailing American class is in a position of relative, but relatively great, economic freedom, and under these conditions it is plain that in them economic self-assertion ("enterprise") has become to a large extent a vicious anachronism. But force of habit, the sheer impetus and groundswell of an antiquated pioneering spirit finds them with no means of personal outlet except a continued economic self-assertion on the one hand, and on the other a reckless and essentially impersonal overflow of surplus wealth which takes the form of doing what

everybody else does, and doing it as much more so as possible.

Because it was for so long the law of the tribe economic self-assertion still remains to most Americans a sort of moral obligation; while self-fulfillment still looks like a pretty word for selfishness. Yet self-fulfillment through science, or literature, or mechanics, or industry itself — the working out of one's own personality, one's own inventiveness through forms of activity that are directly social, as all these activities *are* directly social, gives a man, through his very sociality, through the feeling he has that as a good workman he is coöperating with all other good workmen, a life-interest apart from his rewards. And just as this principle becomes generally diffused and understood the incentive is withdrawn from economic self-assertion, a relative competence being notoriously satisfying to the man whose prime end is the fulfilling of his own creative instincts; and the wealth of the world is already socialized.

You cannot have personality, you cannot have the expressions of personality so long as the end of society is an impersonal end like the accumulation of money. For the individual whose personal end varies too greatly from the end of the mass of men about him not only suffers acutely and becomes abnormal, he actually cannot accomplish anything healthily fine at all. The best and most disinterested individual can only express the better intuitions and desires of his age and place; — there must be some sympathetic touch between him and some visible or invisible host about him, since the mind is a flower that has an organic connection with the soil it springs from.

The only serious approach to society is the personal approach, and what I have called the quickening realism of contemporary social thought is at bottom simply a restatement for the mass of commercialized men, and in relation to issues which directly concern the mass of men as a whole, of those personal instincts that have been the essence

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of art, religion, literature — the essence of personality itself — since the beginning of things. It will remain of the least importance to patch up politics, to become infected with social consciousness, or to do any of the other easy popular contemporary things unless, in some way, personality can be made to release itself on a middle plane between vaporous idealism and self-interested practicality; unless, in short, self-fulfillment as an ideal can be substituted for self-assertion as an ideal. On the economic plane that implies socialism; on every other plane it implies something which a majority of Americans in our day certainly do not possess — an object in living.

VI

It is perhaps just as well that Cervantes lived and died in Spain three hundred years ago. Had he been born an American of the twentieth century he might have found the task of satire an all too overwhelming one. Yet his fable, which has its personal bearing

in all men always, has in America a social bearing that is perhaps unique. Don Quixote is the eternal "Highbrow" under a polite name, just as Sancho Panza is the eternal "Lowbrow"; and if the adorable Dulcinea is not a vision of the night and a daily goal in the mind of our professors, then there is no money in Wall Street. One admits the charm of both extremes, the one so fantastically above, the other so fantastically below the level of right reason; to have any kind of relish for muddled humanity is necessarily to feel the charm of both extremes. But where is all that is real, where is personality and all its works, if it is not essentially somewhere, somehow, in some not very vague way, between?

"Our Poets"

II

"OUR POETS"

I

It is a principle that shines impartially on the just and on the unjust that once you have a point of view all history will back you up. Everything no doubt depends upon evidence; and considering the case which has been outlined in the last chapter, an appeal to American literature, if literature really does record the spirit of a people, is an appeal that leads, I think, to evidence of a material sort.

Something, in American literature, has always been wanting — every one, I think, feels that. Aside from the question of talent, there is not, excepting Walt Whitman, one American writer who comes home to a modern American with that deep, moving, shaking impact of personality for which

one turns to the abiding poets and writers of the world. A certain density, weight, and richness, a certain poignancy, a "something far more deeply interfused," simply is not there.

Above all, the Americanism of our old writers appears to have had no faculty of development and adaptation. With the death of Emerson, Lowell, Holmes and their group something in the American mind really did come to an end. The generation which has gone by since then is a generation which has produced no indisputable leader of thought and letters, which has destroyed the coherence of the old American circle of ideas, and left us at the height of the second immigration among the chaotic raw materials of a perhaps altogether new attitude of mind.

It is, in fact, the plain, fresh, homely, impertinent, essentially innocent old America that has passed; and in its passing the allegory of Rip Van Winkle has been filled with a new meaning. Hendrik Hudson and his men, we see, have begun another game of

bowls, and the reverberations are heard in many a summer thunderstorm; but they have been miraculously changed into Jews, Lithuanians, Magyars, and German socialists. Rip is that old innocent America which has fallen asleep and which hears and sees in a dream the movement of peoples, the thunder of alien wants. And when after twenty years he awakens again, stretches his cold rheumatic limbs, and discovers the long white beard, he will once more set out for home; but when he arrives will he be recognized?

What emotions pass through an hereditary American when he calls to mind the worthies who figured in that ubiquitous long paneled group of "Our Poets" which occupied once so prominent a place in so many domestic interiors? Our Poets were commonly six in number, kindly, gray-bearded, or otherwise grizzled old men. One recalls a prevailing six, with variations. Sometimes a venerable historian was included, a novelist or so, and even Bayard Taylor.

Nothing could make one feel so like a prod-

igal son as to look at that picture. So much for the first glance, the first quick impression after one has come home to it from the far wanderings of an ordinary profane existence. But more complicated emotions supervene. What a world within a world that picture summons up! Frankly, we feel in ourselves, we are no longer so fortunate as in those days. It could really have been said of us then, as it cannot now be said at all, that as a folk we had won a certain coherence, a certain sort of ripeness in the better part of ourselves, which was reflected in the coherence of our men of letters. Whittier, for example, was a common basis, and a very sweet and elevating basis, for a national programme of emotions the like of which no poet since his time has been able to compass. One recalls that fact, so full of meaning; and then, deep down, a forgotten world sweeps back over one, a world of memory, sentiment, and association, a world of influences the most benign — like a mournful autumn wind stirring in forsaken places. . . . But sooner or later

the ordinary profane existence reasserts itself; and we have to put it to ourselves with equal frankness — has any one of these men, or any one of these influences, the power at bottom to make it any less profane? The most beautiful and benign sentiment in the world will not do so unless it has in it that which grips in some way at the root of personality. . . . Then it is we feel how inadequate, faded, and out of touch they are.

It is of no use to go off into a corner with American literature, as most of the historians have done,— in a sulky, private sort of way, taking it for granted that if we give up world values we are entitled to our own little domestic rights and wrongs, criticism being out of place by the fireside. "But oh, wherever else I am accounted dull," wrote Cowper in one of his letters, "let me pass for a genius at Olney." This is the method of the old-fashioned camp in American criticism, just as the method of the contemporary camp is the method of depreciative comparison with better folk than our own.

The only fruitful approach is the personal approach, and to me at least Thoreau, Emerson, Poe, and Hawthorne are possessions forever. This does not alter the fact that if my soul were set on the accumulation of dollars not one of them would have the power to move me from it. And this I take to be a suggestive fact. Not one of them, not all of them, have had the power to move the soul of America from the accumulation of dollars; and when one has said this one has arrived at some sort of basis for literary criticism.

Plainly enough, during what has been called the classical period of American literature, the soul of America did not want to be moved from the accumulation of dollars; plainly enough the pioneering instinct of economic self-assertion was the law of the tribe. And if the New England writers were homogeneous with the American people as no other group, scarcely any other individual, has been since, it is equally plain that they themselves and all their works must have accorded with the law of the tribe. The im-

mense, vague cloud-canopy of idealism which hung over the American people during the nineteenth century was never permitted, in fact, to interfere with the practical conduct of life.

Never permitted, I say, though it is a more accurate explanation that, being essentially impersonal itself, the essence of this idealism lay in the very fact that it had and could have no connection with the practical conduct of life. The most successful and famous writers, Bryant and Longfellow, for example, promoted this idealism, being, so far as one can see, generally satisfied with the ordinary practices of society: they tacitly accepted the peculiar dualism that lies at the root of our national point of view. Emerson's really equivocal individualism on the one hand asserted the freedom and self-reliance of the spirit and on the other justified the unlimited private expediency of the business man. And as a suggestive corollary to all this, the two principal artists in American literature, Poe and Hawthorne, were out of

touch with society as few other artists in the world had been before: to their contemporaries they seemed spectral and aloof, scarcely human, and it could easily be shown that the reaction upon their work of a world to them essentially unreal is equally marked.

Granting these facts, and granting the still more significant fact of the absence from our literature of that deep, moving, shaking impact of personality which would have brought it into more permanent touch with American life, I do not see how we can escape the general axiom: that a society whose end is impersonal and anti-social cannot produce an ideal reflex in literature which is personal and social, and conversely, that the ideal reflex in literature produced by such a society will be unable to educate its own personal and social instincts. In effect, an examination of American literature will show, I think, that those of our writers who have possessed a vivid personal genius have been paralyzed by the want of a social background, while those who have possessed a vivid social genius have been

equally unable to develop their own personalities.

II

And here at the outset a distinction must be drawn between what may be called the literature of necessity and absolute literature. It is perfectly plain that in one aspect literature is a simple cog in the machinery of life. The first generation of American writers were like prudent women who, having moved into a new house, energetically set to work laying down carpets, papering the walls, cutting and hanging the most appropriate window-curtains, and pruning the garden — making it, in short, a place of reasonable charm and contentment.

Than Washington Irving, for example, no one was ever more satisfied with things as they are; prosperity in others aroused in him the most benignant emotions, and there is a description by him of a smiling river farm with its fat hens and waddling pigs which rises to a sort of placid ecstasy — in recollec-

tion one confuses the pigs with little cherubim, and as to the farm itself one wonders why (or indeed whether) angels have not settled there.

The effect of this idyllic treatment is precisely that of the first warm blaze in a newly constructed hearth. It takes away the sense of chill; the room becomes at once cozy and cheerful, and we enjoy the prospect of spending an evening in it.

That is at least a principal element in the work of Irving, Cooper, Bryant, and Longfellow. When these men ceased writing the towns, the woods, the wild-flowers, even the bare and meagre history of America were clothed with memories and associations. It was possible to feel them all, and even to muse upon them. The characters of Cooper lighted up a little fringe of the black uncut forest; they linked the wilderness with our own immemorial human world, just as the little figures Piranesi put in his engravings not only give the scale of his Roman ruins and relate them to the observer's eye but also

arouse the sense of historical connections, the sense of pathos and of man's destiny.

When they wrote of Europe their essential motive was the same as when they wrote of America. Irving's English essays at bottom, as he himself declares, were deliberately intended to place England and America on a basis of mutual good will — a motive, in the proper sense, political. Longfellow never forgot in Europe that he was on leave of absence, and that in gathering specimens he was to bear in mind the soil to which they were to be transplanted. There was nothing in heaven or earth he was not able to prune and fertilize into harmony with the New England temperature; and who will deny that he in turn altered that temperature, warmed and gladdened it,— that he came back as a kind of gulf stream to our frost-bitten civilization, which has been kindlier ever since?

III

But out of this essential motive of the first generation of American writers a second mo-

tive arises. They were moralists, they were shot through and through with all manner of baccalaureate ideals; and this fact opens them to a different sort of treatment. For this let Longfellow and Bryant suffice, for they are typical.

Longfellow is to poetry what the barrel-organ is to music; approached critically he simply runs on, and there is an end to the matter. But nobody dreams of criticising Longfellow from the point of view of "mere literature": the human head and the human heart alike revolt from that. His personal sanction is rightly a traditional one, and the important thing is to see him as a beautifully typical figure and to see just what he typifies.

To Longfellow the world was a German picture-book, never detaching itself from the softly colored pages. He was a man of one continuous mood: it was that of a flaxen-haired German student on his *wanderjahr* along the Rhine, under the autumn sun — a sort of expurgated German student — am-

bling among ruined castles and reddening vines, and summoning up a thousand bright remnants of an always musical past. His was an eminently Teutonic nature of the old school, a pale-blue melting nature; and white hair and grandchildren still found him with all the confused emotion, the charming sadness, the indefinite high proposals of seventeen; — perhaps it was because they had never been opposed, never put to the test in that so innocently successful existence of his that they persisted without one touch of disillusion, one moment of chagrin.

But frankly what preparation is a life like this for the poet whose work it is to revivify a people? The most telling thing I know about Longfellow is that, having remarked that "Carlyle was one of those men who sacrifice their happiness to their work," he himself was well content in later life to surrender the greater part of his time and energies to writing autographs and entertaining children. Here certainly the personal sanction oversteps the mark, just as it does in the case of

indulgent politicians who exhibit their gratitude and warm-heartedness by feathering the nests of all their friends and cousins. Though Longfellow had an unerring eye for the "practical application" that lurks in every shred of romance, totally unable to elude the agile moralist, the value of his moral promptings is just in proportion to the pressure behind them — and where was the pressure? His morals and ideals were, in fact, simply a part of the pretty picture-book, just as they are at seventeen: if they had not been so they would never have been laid on the shelf.

But the "practical application" cannot be dismissed in this way; and if the personal sanction is disarming in relation to Longfellow, the case is otherwise with Bryant, a virile, hard-headed man, whose memory can afford many a blow. To Bryant the moral ending was no half absent-minded flourish of the color brush — it was a tough Puritan reality; and Bryant's use of the moral ending is emblematic not merely, as in Longfellow's

case, of the vacuity and impermanence of so much American idealism, but also of the corollary of these — the failure of Americans in general to develop and express their personality in and through their work.

Bluntly, the use of a moral ending means that the poet is unwilling to leave his effect to the emotion conveyed in the poem itself; he must needs intellectualize this emotion at the close, and show you that this emotion is only used, like cheese in a mouse-trap, to entice the reader into a usually disagreeable fact, for which the whole exists. Now this procedure is full of meaning. For not the emotion, not the expression of personality, but the ulterior object is the essential issue in the mind of the poet: not life, but success, or salvation. And the same principle operates here, and renders the result equally barren, as in work which is done mainly for the ulterior object of making money, in religion which exists merely for the ulterior object of saving one's soul, in thought which exists merely for the ulterior

object of proving something. The excellence and fruitfulness of anything consists in our loving and enjoying it, in our expressing our personality through it. Real poetry springs from the assumption that the spectacle is its own reward, that feeling, happy or unhappy, is final: it is concerned, as Shelley pointed out, not with effects and applications, which are temporary, but with causes, which are permanent. The moral ending is simply a rigid and impersonal intellectualization of life, which is, consequently, out of touch with the motives that really determine men.

For this reason Bryant was never a personality; he was, to be exact, a somewhat eminent personage. After his eighteenth year he was miraculously changed, not into stone, but into wood,— he was as bald, as plain, as immovable, so to say, as an old settee. He had no elasticity, no sense of play either in words, ideas, or emotions; two or three poetic forms sufficed him; even as a journalist he was abstract. One sees him during sixty years perambulating Broadway with that old

blue cotton umbrella of his, the very picture of a spare old Puritan patriarch, with his big muscular joints, a hardy perennial. And all about him one sees that spry, flimsy New York of the forties and fifties and sixties — the New York of "Nothing to Wear" and N. P. Willis. It is these gulfs of contrast which let one into the secret of American humor.

Yes, this old man with his palsied gift, who had for two generations been pursued by glimpses of the grave but who had embalmed within him an incomparable vigor and who, past eighty, put Homer into English — this old man is himself Homeric (with a difference) amid that spawn of decadent Byronism which made up the so-called Knickerbocker school. New York has never possessed dignity — one loves the many-headed beast for a thousand other reasons than that; but it has achieved a sort of Napoleonic right to despise dignity, and it has come to possess its secrets. In the thirties and forties it possessed no secrets at all — it

was the centre of an ingenuous America which had only just learned to be worldly, which the lightest zephyr from London or Paris set fluttering, over which every ripple of fashion broke into a spray of tinsel.

IV

So much is necessary to give Poe what he badly needs, a naturalistic setting: Poe himself, who emerges from this New York of his time like a wreck at sea with its black spars etched against a sort of theatrical sunset. Ironical and sinister as he is, he is by no means "out of space, out of time," if by space we mean New York and by time the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The little imitation Byrons who swarmed about him wrote of haunted Gothic castles, Poe wrote the *House of Usher;* Bianca, Giordano, Ermengarde, Elfrida, Asthene, Zophiel were the human properties of their prose and verse, scarcely to be distinguished from the Madeleines and Eleanores, the Eulalies and Annabels, the Israfels and Al Aaraafs of Poe;

they also lived in a world of moan and a world of moonlight; madness, irreparable farewells, dungeons, assignations, premature burials, hidden treasures, exotic musical instruments, prophetic night birds — these things were of the time and very particularly, since New York provided them with an additional unreality, of the place.

Poe took this bric-à-brac seriously — that is always a distinction and it is Poe's distinction. The tacit conventionalities of the romantic epoch became in him objects of a fierce intellectual concentration. In the comfortable safety of good and abundant food, friendly talk, substantial occupation, his contemporaries amused themselves with spectres, Oriental mysteries, hasheesh, and madness: Poe was the delirium which followed. He was a Byron without scope of action and without purging emotions.

Superficially at least he was not conscious of being out of his element. In those critical essays in which he is so accessible and so honest and has so many disagreeable things to say

about his contemporaries it is never the false taste, never the epoch which displeases him. He likes *The Dying Rosebud's Lament* by Mrs. Fanny Osgood; what irritates him is bad grammar, bad rhymes, and plagiarism. Nor is there the least indication that he thought America provincial, or bourgeois, or depressing to a man of talent. That indeed is an element in the strength of all the American writers of the old school; an instinct of self-preservation kept them at home in spirit; so much of the missionary element was of the texture of what they had to say that a tinge of the cosmopolitan would have neutralized their best effects, would have rendered them personally, as it has certainly rendered Lowell, a little characterless, a little indistinct. But it is a rather disconcerting fact in relation to the theory that Poe is a kind of supersensual enigma, who might have lived with equal results in Babylon or Sioux City. At his second-best, in prose and verse, he is precisely at one both in tone and execution with his intellectual surroundings. At his

best it is this outworn bric-à-brac which is transfigured, just as the suburban bibliolatry of England is transfigured in the drawings of Blake. The important thing is to consider what this bric-à-brac is transfigured into, and why, and what it means.

Since the days of the alchemists no one has produced more than Poe the effects of damnation, no one has been more conscious of being damned. In his pages the breath of life never stirs: crimes occur which do not reverberate in the human conscience, there is laughter which has no sound, there is weeping without tears, there is beauty without love, there is love without children, trees grow which bear no fruit, flowers which have no fragrance,— it is a silent world, cold, blasted, moon-struck, sterile, a devil's heath. Only a sensation of intolerable remorse pervades it.

Poe is commonly called unreal; it is justly said of him that he never touches the general heart of man, that perhaps of all writers who have lived he has the least connection with human experience. Nothing is more sinister

about Poe, for instance, than his tacit acceptance of common morals; you might even say that he is rigidly conventional, if you did not feel that he is conventional merely because the moral world no more exists for him than it exists for a black stone. If you could prove a vicious motive in him, as from certain points of view you can prove a vicious motive in Baudelaire, you might, even in that, establish some fusion between him and the common reason of humankind. Orchids are as much a part of the vegetable kingdom as potatoes, but Poe is an orchid made out of chemicals. Magic is always so; it has the sinister quality of a force operating outside nature, without any relation to human values.

No European can exist without a thousand subterranean relationships; but Americans can so exist, Americans do so exist. Edison, for example, resembles Poe as a purely inventive mathematical intellect and with Edison, as with Poe, you feel that some electric fluid takes the place of blood; you feel that the greatest of inventors cannot

be called a scientist at all, that his amazing powers over nature are not based in any philosophical grasp of the laws of nature, that he is in temperament a mechanic rather than a philosopher. His faculty is to that of Darwin, for example, what fish is to flesh, — to the philosophical animal man he is more incomprehensible; and for all the beneficence of his faculty he is himself a kind of prodigious salamander. Poe is a mechanic of the same sort. He has discovered in literature the chemical secret of life. He has produced chemical men, chemical emotions, chemical landscapes; in *Eureka* he has produced even a chemical philosophy so much like real philosophy that until you try to feel it you will never guess it the most sterile of illusions. For this reason the highly colored effects that light up his tales and his poems are lurid and metallic. The sinister greens and reds and yellows are not, you feel, the flames of honest wood and coal.

To explain all this it is not enough to say that he had a spectral nature, that Emerson

and Jonathan Edwards and Hawthorne had spectral natures, that theosophy and Christian Science suggest that this quality is a typical American quality. So much is probably true, but more is required; and to approach Poe is to approach those mysteriously fascinating thaumaturgic elements in nature which are responsible for most of the fraudulent science in the world. One treads warily on the outer edges of psychology, and I suppose it is not accurately known what forces of the mind were involved in mediæval witchcraft, in alchemy, in the conception of Mephistopheles. But certainly to the Middle Ages the intelligence in and for itself was felt to be a maleficent force: Mephistopheles himself in the old legends is nothing other than pure intellect, irresponsible and operating independently of life. Necessarily therefore to him faith, love and hope are illusions, and he is the negation of the soul. Above all, it is the secret of creating life for which in the mediæval imagination souls were bartered to the devil: one obtained the power of com-

peting with God at the price of a perpetual consciousness of one's own damnation. These are dark ways; but one emerges into the region of knowledge when one affirms that, by their mental twist, witches and alchemists were not convicted by society any more than they were convicted in themselves of having done the unpardonable and the irreparable. And certain it is that Poe experienced in his own imagination this power and this damnation. His haunted face, his driven life, the barren world which he has built and peopled, the horror of his accustomed mood, the inextinguishable obscure remorse that broods in him unite in this fact.

The power he still exerts is an hysterical rather than a literary power, and who can say what it signifies? But one thing seems true, with regard alike to witchcraft, alchemy, and Poe, that the mind can work healthily only when it is essentially in touch with the society of its own age. No matter into what unknown region it presses, it must have a point of relativity in the common reason of its time

and place. Poe, having nothing in common with the world that produced him, constructed a little parallel world of his own, withered at the core, a silent comment. It is this that makes him so sterile and so inhuman; and he is himself, conversely, the most menacing indictment of a society which is not also an all-embracing organism.

V

Poe and Hawthorne, certainly, were much more of a common stock in temperament than the New York and New England of their time: the temperament which in Poe is at once vulgarized by vulgar circumstances and pressed up into the intellect is diffused in the character and work of Hawthorne; the harsher lights are neutralized, the familiar world reappears again — but is it the familiar world? Hawthorne's talent is like a phosphorescent pool; you touch it, you move your hand there and a thousand subdued elusive lights dance through it, but before you can fix your eye upon one it has retreated through

the clear water, the still depths that in effect are so impenetrable.

No other talent is of so shining a purity as Hawthorne's,— scarcely one other so light, so inevitable, so refined, so much a perfectly achieved intention. He models in mist as the Greeks modeled in marble; his beings take shape in the imagination with a sunlit perfection, but only for a moment; they melt and pass; the air is filled with a phantasmagorical movement of shapes, grouping themselves, putting on corporeality as a garment and at the same time dissolving into the nebulous background. It is a cloud pageant and the clouds are of opal dust. The Puritan conscience in Hawthorne is like some useful but inartistic Roman vessel of glass which has been buried for centuries in the earth and which comes forth at last fragile as a dragonfly's wing, shot through with all the most exquisite colors. He is the most opalescent of writers, and each of his books is an opal of a different type: crimson, purple and emerald cross and recross *The Marble Faun,* and all

the most fleeting tints of pale yellow, pale green, and pearly white shimmer through the *Blithedale Romance,* with a single strain of tragic red passing athwart it in the character of Zenobia. A hundred times the world of Hawthorne seems the familiar world, but just as we imagine we have gained a foothold there a wand passes over it, a wall is removed behind it,— it has become a world within a world.

This leads one almost to forget that Hawthorne's range is limited, that his gift is meagre and a little anæmic, that his poetry is not quite the same thing as wisdom. For if like the greatest poets he sees life as a fable, with a fable's infinitely multiplied correspondences, he feels it rather as a phantom than as a man. This being who passed twelve years of his youth in a solitary, close-curtained room, walking abroad only in the twilight or after the sun had set, was himself a phantom in a phantom world. Observe how he treats any one of his typical characters, the elfish little Priscilla, for example.

He is describing the rumors current among her neighbors and how they believed that "the sun, at midday, would shine through her; in the first gray of the twilight, she lost all the distinctness of her outline; and, if you followed the dim thing into a dark corner, behold, she was not there." And he goes on in his own person: "There was a lack of human substance in her; it seemed as if, were she to stand up in a sunbeam, it would pass right through her figure, and trace out the cracked and dusty window-panes upon the naked floor." Could anything be more exquisite? Could anything more entirely fail to connect with reality in a practical Yankee world?

It is the natural corollary of all this that Hawthorne himself, as a social being (in his opinions especially — for he did not abstain from opinions), was more than commonly conventional. It is natural that this most deeply planted of American writers, who indicates more than any other the subterranean history of the American character, should

have recoiled from every attempt to change, rectify, or spiritualize society; that he should have been incurious of every forward-looking impulse, a rather more than indifferent anti-abolitionist, a much more than indifferent anti-Transcendentalist, and though actively concerned with politics in one way or another through his middle and later years always on the uninteresting side. His talent was a kind of Prospero's isle quite outside the world he lived in. It was *kept* outside that world by his own infallible instinct of artistic self-preservation. The comment he puts into the mouth of Miles Coverdale *à propos* of the "philanthropist" Hollingsworth is really his own comment on the society in which he found himself: "The moral which presents itself to my reflections, as drawn from Hollingsworth's character and errors, is simply this,— that admitting what is called philanthropy, when adopted as a profession, to be often useful by its energetic impulse to society at large, it is perilous to the individual whose ruling passion, in one ex-

clusive channel, it thus becomes. It ruins, or is fearfully apt to ruin, the heart, the rich juices of which God never meant should be pressed violently out, and distilled into alcoholic liquor, by an unnatural process, but should render life sweet, bland, and gently beneficent, and insensibly influence other hearts and other lives to the same blessed end."

Hawthorne was right with regard to the society of his day, but consider what he lost and what we have lost by it. It is not the business of an artist as such to change society, and if Hawthorne held aloof from everything that stood for movement in his time that was the price of being sensitively organized in an age of rude, vague, boisterous, dyspeptic, incoherent causes. The fact that Hawthorne and Poe were the only two eminent minds of their age to which Transcendentalism was profoundly repugnant is the surest proof that they alone possessed the full and the right artistic instinct. They had to do what they could in society as it was — and what hap-

pened? Outwardly accepting it, but having nothing in common with it, they neither enriched society nor were enriched by it; they were driven to create and inhabit worlds of their own,— diaphanous private worlds of mist and twilight.

VI

I find it impossible to approach the question of Transcendentalism — the thing itself, and Emerson, Margaret Fuller, the Dial, Brook Farm, and all the other permutations and combinations of it — without first of all expelling a persistent spleen, and then submitting myself to long explanations. So much truth, so much talent, so much of the American character is involved in that queer miasmatical group of lunar phenomena, in which philosophy, self-culture, politics, art, social reform, and religion were all mixed up and all felt to be, in some vague way, the same thing. One angel no doubt can stand quite comfortably on the point of a pin, but when a whole battalion of angels attempt to oc-

cupy this identical space there is war in heaven.

It is plain enough that the Transcendentalists had no sense of the relationship that exists between theory and practice, between the abstract and the concrete. The world they lived in was an excessively concrete world — a world of isolated facts. The white wooden houses, the farms, the patches of wood, the self-contained villages, each with its town-meeting, the politician, the minister, the lawyer, the merchant were, in fact, very much what Emerson called his own sentences, "infinitely repellent particles"; they had, relatively speaking, nothing in common but the Yankee temperament — and the quality of this common temperament was to be as *un*-common, as individual and as different, as possible. There was no fusion, no operative background of social forces, no unwritten laws. The experience of New England was an experience of two extremes — bare facts and metaphysics: the machinery of self-preservation and the mystery of life. Experience

of the world, of society, of art, the genial middle ground of human tradition existed only as an appetite. Painting, sculpture, architecture were represented by engravings; history, travel, world-politics, great affairs in general were represented by books. The habit of looking at things in the abstract, native to the old Calvinistic temper, was extended over the range of social and intellectual interests, partly as a result of isolation, partly because of the highly tenuous connection between these interests and the primitive actualities of life as New Englanders knew it.

German philosophy when it was released over the world inevitably came to port in this society, for above everything else it appeared to let one into the secret of universal experience. If, under the influence of this philosophy, you sat up late enough at night you could be an Alexander, a Plato, a Raphael or (in Boston) a Washington Allston, without moving out of your chair. It is true you gained no territory and painted no pictures by this method, but you at least placed your-

self at the seat of operations where all these wonderful things occur.

This accounts for the peculiar flavor of that old New England culture, so dry, so crisp, so dogmatic, so irritating. Having entered wholly through the brain in the form of general propositions, without any checking from observation or experience, it seems curiously inverted, curiously unreal. Witness for example that strange far-away tone in which Emerson so often and so characteristically refers to "Plato and Paul and Plutarch, Augustine, Spinoza, Chapman, Beaumont and Fletcher," or "the remains of Phidias, the Apollo, the Jove, the paintings and statues of Michael Angelo, the works of Canova." There would be something quite ludicrous in this glimpse of St. Paul, Fletcher, Phidias and Spinoza arm in arm if you felt that Emerson had ever realistically pictured to himself these men as they individually were. To him they were all thrice-purified ghosts, ghosts of the printed page; the associations of the tavern, the synagogue, the drawing-room had fallen

from their spirits in the mind of Emerson as utterly as from their bodies in the grave. To him they were exceptionally fine manifestations of the Over-Soul; philosophy like death had leveled them and had, as entirely, removed them from the region of terrestrial society, literature, and art. So also in effect when Margaret Fuller comes to the conclusion that "color is consecrate to passion and sculpture to thought." Having thus as it were removed the whole question to another planet, she is able to present us further with a jewel of criticism like this: "The Prophets and Sibyls are for the Michael Angelos. The Beautiful is Mr. Allston's dominion" (statements which make one feel a thousand years old). Yet this result is inevitable when works of art are approached not through the eye but through the mind: the element of taste, the perceptions of sense, once laid aside, there is no gulf between Phidias and Canova, between Michael Angelo and Washington Allston.

And then consider Emerson's style,— that

strange fine ventriloquism, that attenuated voice coming from a great distance, which so often strikes one as a continual falsetto. If it is extremely irritating — and I have known amiable and well-disposed persons to be exasperated by it,— if it is filled with assertions that fairly insist upon being contradicted, it is because so often Emerson is abstract at the wrong times and concrete at the wrong times, because he has so little natural sense of the relation between the abstract and the concrete. Take, for instance, a typical sentence like this: "Archimedes will look through your Connecticut machine, at a glance, and judge of its fitness"— to which the inevitable reply is, that Archimedes will do nothing of the kind: I no more possess a Connecticut machine than Archimedes will put on mortality again to look through it. Is it unfair to literalize these metaphorical affirmations of Emerson? Of course I understand that to him "Archimedes" is merely a name for that particular aspect of the Over-Soul which broods over machinery, while my "Connec-

ticut machine" means any human device that will serve to exhibit its powers of divination. But a prose which violates the actual overmuch, a prose in which the poetic effect is more than a heightened version of the actual is, I think, a prose one is entitled to find irritating. And furthermore his method of simply announcing as axiomatic what is in his mind is justified only by the possession of a faculty which Emerson does not possess, the faculty of hitting the nail inevitably on the head. Let one example suffice: "Shelley, though a poetic mind, is never a poet. His muse is uniformly imitative; all his poems composite. A good English scholar he is, with ear, taste, and memory; much more, he is a character full of noble and prophetic traits; but imagination, the original, authentic fire of the bard, he has not." Does this really suggest Shelley?

Emerson's artistic impressions are always of this hit-or-miss character; he can write page after page about a painter or a poet without one intelligibly apt utterance. Much

the same is true of Carlyle and Ruskin, and for the same reason, that alike they all refer art to an extra-artistic standard. But Carlyle and Ruskin are concrete enough in their own wilful ways, while Emerson is persistently abstract. He never lingers in the bodily world, he is always busy to be off again; and if he takes two or three paces on the earth they only serve to warm him for a fresh aërial adventure. Thus the essay on *Illusions* opens with an account of a day spent in the Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, and after the second sentence he continues in this way: "I lost the light of one day. I saw high domes, and bottomless pits; heard the voice of unseen waterfalls," etc. That is not the tone of descriptive writing; a glamour like that of oratory has fallen over it; phrase by phrase the effect is heightened and generalized under the reader's eye; we see how impatient he is to get to the real business and that the experience is already dimmed and evaporated by the approaching application.

The truth is that Emerson was not inter-

ested in human life; he cared nothing for experience or emotion, possessing so little himself. "He generally addressed me as if I were wholly impersonal," writes one of his disciples, who records an observation of Emerson that he "could never turn a dozen pages of *Don Quixote* or Dickens without a yawn." This accounts for the way in which his thoughts inevitably flew for refuge to capital letters, emerging as Demonology, Creeds, Prudence, the Ideal, abstractions all. His point of view was formed very early; all his later books are sprouts from the first one, and there is no indication of growth, imbibition, or excursiveness beyond his original boundaries. If he remained open he was open only as it were at the top; and before he was thirty-five he seems to have acquired that fixed, benignant, musing smile which implies the consciousness of having solved one's own problem and which is usually accompanied by a closure of the five senses.

I say all this without prejudice to Emerson's position in the world of the spirit. There

he truly lived and lives, and of all American writers he alone appears to me to have proved the reality of that world and to have given some kind of basis to American idealism.

But Emerson's idealism was double-edged: it was concerned not merely with the spiritual life of the individual, but also with the individual in society, with the "conduct of life." This latter aspect of his teaching was in fact the secret of his contemporary influence. For if the logical result of a thorough-going, self-reliant individualism in the world of the spirit is to become a saint, it is no less true that the logical result of a thorough-going, self-reliant individualism in the world of the flesh is to become a millionaire. And in fact it would be hard to say whether Emerson more keenly relished saintliness or shrewdness. Both qualities he himself possessed in a high degree, as only an American can; and if on one side of his nature he was a most lonely and beautiful seer, the records of his life prove that he lacked none of the sagacity and caution of the true Yankee husbandman. He

perfectly combined the temperaments of Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin; — the upper and lower levels of the American mind are fused in him and each becomes the sanction of the other.

In the long run there is a world of difference between individualism on the spiritual plane and individualism on the economic plane. Were it not so there would be no meaning in the phrase "Stone walls do not a prison make," there would be no meaning in Christianity. And therein consists the beauty and the permanence of Emersonianism. For as the scope of enterprise and self-reliance becomes with every generation more limited, as the generality of men are caught with both feet in the net of economic necessity and are led thereby to seek scope for their initiative in disinterested activity, just so the Emersonian doctrine comes into its own, the Emersonian virtues mount upward and create a self-reliance in the spirit itself. Emersonianism, in short, can only begin to be itself when it has taken its final place on the

plane of poetry. In the nineteenth century it was economic as well; it was the voice of just those forces which moved, enlarged, created the American scene; it corresponded to a real freedom of movement and opportunity; pioneers, inventors, men of business, engineers, seekers of adventure found themselves expressed and justified in it. Emerson presided over and gave its tone to this world of infinite social fragmentation and unlimited free will, a world in which — as the presupposition was — everyone started fresh, as if dropped from the sky, where entanglements of heredity and disposition, foreclosures of opportunity, desires and aims which require an already fertilized field for their development, where the whole welter of human history and social complexity had not yet as it were obscured the morning of time.

In all this Emerson was essentially passive. He was the child of his age, and what he did was to give his Yankee instincts free play under the sanction of his Transcendental idealism. He never dreamed of moulding society,

and he was incapable of an effective social ideal. Compare him in this respect with Carlyle. The social ideal of Carlyle was the Hero, and what Carlyle meant by the Hero was a particular kind of being whom all Englishmen understand: a creature of flesh and blood who leads men. No doubt Carlyle was absurd enough; but what made him nevertheless a mighty man was that he had the faculty of devising and making intensely real and contagious a social ideal the rudiments of which actually existed in the people he was addressing. The English admire heroism; Carlyle made the Hero a conscious and palpable objective; and his countrymen were stirred through and through. Carlyle counts his disciples from generation to generation; strong men and leaders of men, they go out conquering and ruling creation, and there is hardly a British governor who does not feel the apostolic hands of Carlyle upon his head. Preposterous no doubt they are, having so little of the science and humility that are proper to our late-sprung arboreal species. But who

will deny that the doctrine itself has served to make them good human material — for a better doctrine?

What can Emerson show as a social ideal? *Representative Men.* Emerson has chosen six names, five of which are the names of writers, the sixth that of a man of action, Napoleon, whom, let us hope, Young America will not too closely emulate. The social ideal of Emerson, as Froude pointed out, is a sort of composite of the philosopher, the mystic, the sceptic, the poet, the writer, and the man of the world. I wonder what passed through the mind of the American business man of Emerson's day when he heard all these phrases, phrases so unrelated to the springs of action within himself? Did he feel that his profound instincts had been touched and unified, did he see opening before him the line of a disinterested career, lighted up by a sudden dramatization of his own finest latent possibilities, did he not rather, with a degree of reason, say to himself: "These papers will serve very well

to improve my mind. I shall read them when I have time"? And did he not thereupon set to work accumulating all the more dollars in order that he might have the more time to cultivate his mind — in legal phrase — after the event?

Looked at from this side Emerson has all the qualities of the typical baccalaureate sermon; and the baccalaureate sermon, as we know, beautiful as it often is, has never been found inconveniently inconsistent with the facts and requirements of business life. A glance at Young America after so many generations of being talked to might well convince one that something is wrong with the baccalaureate sermon. Since the day of Emerson's address on "The American Scholar" the whole of American literature has had the semblance of one vast, all-embracing baccalaureate sermon, addressed to the private virtues of young men. It has been one shining deluge of righteousness, purity, practical mysticism, the conduct of life, and at the end of ninety years the highest ambition of Young

America is to be — do I exaggerate? — the owner of a shoe-factory. As a result of this exclusive approach through the personal conscience (a conscience by no means connected with disinterested ends and the real development of personality), society in America has permanently stood for two things: in its private aspect as an immense preserve for the exercise of personal virtues like thrift, self-assertion, family provision, nest-feathering in general; in its public aspect as a thing to be coddled with rich gifts (Philanthropy) or scrubbed back to the political intentions of 1776 (Reform).

Emerson is the patron saint of every one of these diverse, chaotic impulses — the gentle, chime-like Emerson who in days to come will sound and shine over a better world.

VII

But since I have spoken of the disciples of Carlyle as arguing the force if not the validity of his social ideal I must add something about

the disciples of Emerson, and the personal and social effects of Transcendentalism in American society.

George William Curtis I take to have been the typical Emersonian young man, and I am probably the only person of this generation who has read all his writings. This was the result of having taken a furnished house in California, very new and clean, with little idealistic mottoes hanging from every bracket. Great care had been given to the selection of artistic doorknobs and grass-plaited mats; the cupboards were stuffed with albums of wild-flowers and with notebooks filled with nature poems of the minor sort and penciled observations always unfinished and in a vague, wavering hand. An aroma of delicate futility spread from this house, and while gradually becoming conscious of this I discovered everywhere, on the shelves, in the closets, under the albums, the works of George William Curtis: lives, letters, essays, sketches, eulogies, orations. He was plainly the favorite author of the establishment and wherever

one sat down for a moment there was George William Curtis at one's elbow.

A dozen or so types exhaust the range of a people, and I have known several duplicates of our milder American Addison. In action he was admirable as a driver out of money-changers — the virginal candor of his type assured that. But he had that pale, earnest cast of mind which always comes from thinking more about what Sir Galahad didn't do than about the object of his quest; and in fact the philosophy of George William Curtis is the most mournful exhibition I know of the inner workings of the Reformer's mind. It is in his social criticism that he betrays the incurable boyishness, the superannuated boyishness of the Emersonian tradition in its main line of influence, and the quantity and quality of his understanding of society is fairly well summed up in his energetic though perfectly well-mannered invective against smoking cigarettes in the presence of ladies.

If Transcendentalism ran to seed in George William Curtis, what were its personal and

social effects at the source? He would be an ungentle soul who did not feel a certain tenderness for the Brook Farmers, who did not wish that a really wicked world had been provided expressly for them to make over. New England was not wicked: it was only a very just expression of the Yankee temperament, and the reformers showed no disposition whatever to de-Yankeeize themselves. Their instincts were perfectly right; they rebelled against the sordidness of a world given over to economic self-assertion; but they did not recognize that in their day economic self-assertion was the law of the tribe, and that under those conditions the prettiest communism imaginable could be nothing better than group-assertion or moonshine. They approached society through the abstract impulsion of German and French philosophy; having received this impulsion and being practical themselves they had to "do something," and what they did was Brook Farm. Abolition was the one strictly social cause they supported, and the South had reason to

know how abstract was the New England prosecution of that cause. Half the grotesque, pathetic, and charming futility of men like Bronson Alcott is due to the extraordinary amount of intellectual and moral machinery they set running, without real pressure and without real purpose. They were like high-minded weather-cocks on a windless day.

To Margaret Fuller one turns for the personal bearings of this malady. She sums up the whole story of Transcendentalism — its cause and its cure. For she was eminently caused by Transcendentalism and her unique distinction lies in having been cured of it. In her position as priestess of Boston, Margaret was a fount of this universal experience, engendered backwards as it were in the unadulterated brain. At sixteen we find her asking a correspondent whether she would rather be "the brilliant de Staël or the useful Edgeworth." She sleeps five hours and masters six languages. She reads herself sallow, blinks, and speaks through her nose. She is

morbid, sarcastic, and suffers from incessant headache. Emerson, at first setting eyes on her, says to himself, "We shall never get far." At twenty-nine she begins her celebrated "Conversations," choosing the Greek mythology as her theme because it is "playful as well as deep." One member of her class demurring at the idea that a Christian people can have anything to learn from the religion of a heathen one, Margaret finds it very easy to dispose of this objection. At last in a perfect ecstasy of wrong-headedness she devotes four conversations to the subject of Venus considered as the type of Instinctive Womanhood: one fancies how she must have demolished that lady.

But what happened then? It has been the tradition in America to laugh at the first half of Margaret's story; it would have been wiser to pay more attention to the second half, which is a moral to every American idealist.

Margaret, who had always been conscious of possessing what she called the European

mind, finally went to Europe. No sooner had she set foot on foreign soil than she began to thaw. Among statesmen, revolutions, sieges, human causes, in hospitals and prisons, this fantastic New England prodigy became serene, capable, commanding. And when, from the Roman military hospital of which she was superintendent during the siege of 1849 she writes home to Emerson, it is Emerson who appears the stiff and limited provincial and she the one that has known men and cities. And this is equally true of her writings. Hysterical in everything she had said of German philosophy, she writes of Cromwell like the wife of an ambassador, with justice, point, and sense, and she is equally just and pointed in her views of Mazzini, Carlyle, George Sand, and Garibaldi, once she has seen them, so to speak, in action. Along with all this she had the good sense to acquire a husband and a baby, two things which always have the most salutary effect on Transcendental women.

What is the moral of all this? It is the

moral and the nemesis of all unattached idealism: that the more deeply and urgently and organically you feel the pressure of society the more deeply and consciously and fruitfully you feel and you become yourself.

VIII

This moral is reënforced quite specially by the case of James Russell Lowell.

Very little, it seems to me, is left of Lowell except the size of him. He was a sizable man, he remains a sizable figure, but one that has curiously gone blank. He occupied a considerable space in the world, he became that interesting psychological fact, a Standard Poet, he has been used by the American people to stop the gap where a great critic ought to have been. What is wrong with him, what is missing in him, what has happened to him?

No American writer appears to have been so naturally gifted as Lowell. In his youth he was all animal spirits and impressionability, a sunny, easy nature with a local tang at

bottom which gave edge to an otherwise too mellifluous talent. He rose easily and at once out of the provincial atmosphere which constrained all his contemporaries. The Transcendentalists, having sprung from Calvinism, were unable to approach art unless they could in some way justify themselves by making it an organ of religion; they sanctified it by placing it at arm's length and rendering it abstract. Lowell, singularly, was born without scruples of this kind; he read and wrote in a natural secular spirit, and his poems range pleasantly over the ranges of other poets, without effort and without missionary zeal, in a substantial and cultivated way. His critical essays are similar: what distinguishes them is a quality that belongs not to the better sort of criticism in his own age but to that of the age preceding it, the quality which Hazlitt called *gusto* — a spontaneous new-found relish in relishable things. He liked best the placid, unsuggestive, agreeably bovine writers like Dryden, and he called Shakespeare master. Why is it that Shake-

speare is never the master of originating minds? Plato may be, or Dante, or Tolstoi, or one's uncle, or the village postmaster, but not Shakespeare. Conceive the discomfort of Shakespeare living had any one proclaimed himself a disciple. The ten-millionth Hindu is a more inevitable master; and certainly any one who requires a lesson of Shakespeare comes away with nothing but grace and good humor.

Yet one persists in feeling that Lowell's mental framework was on a large scale, that the framework was simply not filled in. Superficially he appears the most complete, the most perfectly fused American literary personality; in reality he suffered more than any other from the want of a suitable background and is the most unfulfilled of all. That is because his culture is European without the corresponding pressure and responsibility of the European mind. He was the contemporary of Matthew Arnold, of Ruskin, of Taine; in his representative character, in his vitality, he is of a stature equal to any of

these; but where they have ideas and passions he remains the genial ambassador. The truth is that Lowell had no ideas, or rather what he had were dummy ideas like democracy and patriotism, which in common usage mean nothing but which enable the mind to go round and round in a large kind of way without involving the difficult intellectual act of clinching something. He paid the penalty of detaching himself from the ethical idea, which alone in its various ramifications has been able to make the New England temperament an interesting one, by being unable to arrive at any other.

For this he was not by any means to blame. The individual responds to the pressure exerted upon him; his epoch, his race, his social background determine the character of this pressure. Ideas rarely exist, and when they exist they never come to fruition, except as representative of forces lying behind the individual which press and focus the individual and make him the mouthpiece of something greater, deeper, wider than himself. The

real forces of American life during the nineteenth century were forces to which Lowell was not fitted to respond; they were individualistic, ethical, and spiritual — they were, in a word, Emersonian. The strength of Emersonianism in its own time lay in its being a genuine response to an economic situation, an answering pressure, a justification of universally experienced needs and impulses. And what is true of Emerson is true of other writers in their kind and degree. Thoreau, for example, was a man of far less native intellectual power than Lowell, a smaller man all round; but precisely because he was individualistic and spiritualistic, because, inadequate as his background was, he was a natural response to it, his talent became intense, and that vivid little genius of his, that pungent and confined personality, remains a most positive possession. All American thought of any eminence (and most of no eminence) has had the nature of a private message; and we have scarcely produced an even

second-rate publicist. For deep responds to deep.

Now it is equally plain that Lowell was deficient in the typical traits of effective American thought as that he was naturally endowed with the traits of a social thinker. He had no interest either in his ego or in the cosmos; he was not at home in high latitudes, could not abide Shelley, philologizes over the loftier passages of Spenser, never speaks of Goethe without vaguely insinuating a grudge against him; he was not concerned in pointing morals. On the other hand, he had a gift for satire, a quite genuine scholarship, a definite good taste in literature as such (in distinction from the Emersonian view of literature as a reservoir of examples, morals, phrases, allusions with which to dress out one's own philosophy), a wide experience of men and manners.

These are two altogether distinct sets of qualities: the point is, that while the first set, which Lowell did not possess, arrived in Emerson and Thoreau at a quite eminent ful-

fillment, the second set, which Lowell did possess, were scarcely fulfilled at all. Emerson and Thoreau achieved their individualistic philosophy, and in that philosophy their individualistic traits were fused and intensified; but Lowell never achieved a social philosophy, and as a result his social traits were scattered and frittered away. His gift for satire was scarcely developed beyond the clever doggerel of the *Fable for Critics,* his wide experience of men and manners served only to make him personally gracious and attractive, his scholarship instead of serving to unearth and elucidate large conceptions and general ideas served merely to exhibit a thousand unassociated verbal ingenuities, his taste in literature found expression in a series of critical essays every one of which is a *cul-de-sac,* with twinkling lights all along the way, but leading nowhither and ending with itself.

You run through his poems with a quite astounding sense of talent wasted, prettified, conventionalized for the want of animating

issues. Give him an adequate issue and you find his whole manner changes. Witness the *Commemoration Ode,* witness *The Biglow Papers.* Slavery and the Mexican war receive in *The Biglow Papers,* it seems to me, just the right measure of literary attention; and this is a felicity which, in the light of his general exuberance, powers of expression, strength and solidity, makes one feel that he could have risen aptly to issues of a more strictly social type had they existed in his background.

The poems of Lowell, in fact, exhibit something which no other body of American poems exhibit, a constant sense of the want of worthy material, a constant suspension of the best faculties. He marks time, rhymes because the rhymes insist upon coming, because of a sheer exuberance which cannot be gainsaid, aware all the while that his words are far more than adequate to anything they actually convey. Of no other American poet is this true: certainly not of Whitman, who, on the contrary, labors for language equal to

his idea, nor of Longfellow in his gentle complacency, nor of Whittier, whose narrow but real talent was precisely modulated to the two or three things he had to say, nor of Emerson, whose words are a chime, choice and serene. And Lowell, on the other hand, as constantly seems to be on the point of rising to great issues, to be waiting for them, to be as it were making bids for them. Whenever his heart is fully engaged in his work (which is not often), whenever his emotion is really vented, the quality of his emotion is thoroughly social; its quality is far denser and of wider scope than that of any other American poet save Whitman. What it almost entirely wants is intellectual structure, intellectual contact, ideas. Consider, for example, *The Present Crisis*. The emotional effect of such a passage as that beginning "For Humanity sweeps onward—" is very nearly a magnificent effect: the emotion of almost any poetry written merely to further a cause (and virtually all American poetry which has any claim to the epithet "social" has been written

to further a cause) is thin and shrill beside it; it *has* density, it *has* scope, it *has* some of the splendor which goes with anything massive that has found a voice. But when you try to discover the intellectual structure of it, the intellectual contact of it, the ideas in it, when you inquire what Humanity is and what it is sweeping onward *to* you find that Lowell is as vague and flatulent as Tom Paine and Mr. Bryan. No social pressure, no defined issues, no discipline lies behind him. He is simply being magnificently and generously emotional in a social and intellectual vacuum.

Now, Tennyson is not a poet from whom one expects ideas; he is conspicuously, among English poets, one who shunned ideas, shunned issues of every kind, and would have avoided them altogether if he could. *Locksley Hall,* aside from its curiously antiquated personal sentiment, also contains a picture of the onward sweep of humanity. It has none of the social passion of Lowell's poem, it presents no sort of coherent vision, the ideas in it, like the ideas in *Maud* and *In Memo-*

riam, once you disentangle them from their poetical glamour, emerge merely as part of the general intellectual bric-à-brac of the Victorian age, owing nothing to the personal experience of Tennyson himself. But the ideas are there; if they are dim and confused it is not because Tennyson was ignorant of them but because he was on the whole not interested in them; he employs them, not for the sake of the ideas, but because he regarded his own poetical function as a representative function and had somehow, if he was to make his particular faith prevail, to make it prevail among these ideas and over them. He was surrounded on all sides by men like Darwin, Mill, Carlyle, Newman, pressed on all sides by conflicting ideas and issues, and with no native inclination for it he was forced into the position of a fighter.

Such is the effect of a social background upon a writer with no native capacity for being a social force. Such is the effect of the want of a social background upon a writer with great native capacity for being

a social force. For if the background of Lowell was, in its individual aspect, a spectacle of enterprise and pluck, socially it was arbitrary, undisciplined, windy, bare, and almost infinitely trivial. And there is no doubt that if Lowell had been produced by any European people he would have been something like a great man. Bred in New England, he was like a born general whose country persists in remaining at peace: such a man skirmishes about in his youth, picks petty quarrels, adopts a commanding attitude, thinks in regiments; and gradually settles down a little fatuously among other military men, talks tactics, tells war stories, reads the reminiscences of dead soldiers, and writes negligible books on armament. In Europe, where the warfare of ideas, of social philosophies, is always an instant close-pressed warfare in which everyone is engaged, Lowell would have had the opportunity to bring his artillery into play. In America, where no warfare of ideas has ever existed, where ideas have always been acutely individual and ethi-

cal, and where public and social affairs, disjointed, vague, and bare, have always met with the yawning indifference that springs from a relative want of pressure behind, he inevitably became indifferent. His was the indifference of a simple and confirmed man of letters,— that is to say, a poet who has made his peace with the world.

Lowell, in a word, never arrived at a comprehensive attitude toward the inner forces of which books, men, and affairs are symptomatic. Now a point of view in criticism, criticism in the genuine sense, is a working-plan, a definition of issues, which at once renders it impossible to make one's peace with the world, at once and permanently sets one at odds with the world, inevitably makes the critic a champion and a man of war. Generous impulses and enthusiasms, which Lowell had abundantly in his youth, are not enough, unless they are reënforced and in a way solidified into some sort of personal programme; the sort of programme which, to take instances from among Lowell's contem-

poraries, Carlyle had in his hero-worship, Ruskin in his central idea of the interaction of harmonious art and harmonious life, Mazzini in his brotherhood of peoples, Taine in his theory of the *milieu,* Nietzsche in his supermorality. To have such a programme is not a limitation; it corresponds on the plane of ideas to style on the plane of letters; it is not merely the mark of intense individuality, not merely the trait which makes men significant and interesting: it is the condition of life in the intellectual and moral world.

The Precipitant

III

THE PRECIPITANT

I have been trying to show in what way a survey of American literature would inevitably lead us to certain general facts about American life. I opened the survey with a statement which I think no one will contradict, that in American literature something has always been wanting, that a certain density, weight, and richness, a certain poignancy, a "something far more deeply interfused," simply is not there. Beginning with this clue and reaching an axiom to which it seemed to me inevitably to lead, I suggested a certain practical conclusion as the result of our inquiry: that those of our writers who have possessed a vivid personal talent have been paralyzed by the want of a social background, while those who have possessed a

vivid social talent have been equally unable to develop their personalities.

There is, I think, something in some not very vague way unsatisfactory about each of the writers we have been examining. Taken as a whole the most characteristic fact about them is a certain delicacy which arrives in literature almost in the degree to which it stands remote from life, achieves its own salvation (after the Puritan fashion) by avoiding contact with actuality. Almost all the greater American writers, placed beside their English contemporaries, have a certain all too unworldly refinement. Purity of style and delicacy of touch at once distinguish Emerson from Carlyle and Hawthorne from any Victorian novelist; but the abyss between their writings and the world in which they lived is immeasurably greater. The American character speaks through them, of course, but it is the American character only in its most sublimated form, carefully cleansed as it were and highly rarified. Nothing is more marked than their disinclination to take a

plunge, reckless and complete, as Carlyle and Dickens did, into the rudest and grossest actualities. The poet Camoens on his deathbed observed that his whole life had been spent in trying to keep himself afloat in a stormy sea, and his only care had been to exercise his left hand with double energy so that his right hand might be free to hold his *Luciad* aloft, uncontaminated by the waves. This is the whole story of American literature: in a more than usually difficult and sordid world it has applied its principal energies to being uncontaminated itself. It has held aloof, as a consciously better part, like all American idealism. The talent is there, high and dry; and if it is not always too high, it is very often a great deal too dry.

In fact, we have in America two publics, the cultivated public and the business public, the public of theory and the public of action, the public that reads Maeterlinck and the public that accumulates money: the one largely feminine, the other largely masculine. Wholly incompatible in their ideals they still

pull together, as the ass and the ox must. But the ass shows no disposition to convert the ox, nor the ox the ass. They do not mitigate one another; — they are, in biological phrase, infertile with one another.

But it happens that we have the rudiments of a middle tradition, a tradition which effectively combines theory and action, a tradition which is just as fundamentally American as either flag-waving or money-grabbing, one which is visibly growing but which has already been grossly abused; and this is the tradition which begins with Walt Whitman. The real significance of Walt Whitman is that he, for the first time, gave us the sense of something organic in American life.

Whitman was himself a great vegetable of a man, all of a piece in roots, flavor, substantiality, and succulence, well-ripened in the common sunshine. In him the hitherto incompatible extremes of the American temperament were fused. The exquisite refinement of the Puritan tradition, summed up as an original type in Jonathan Edwards, able to

make nothing of a life so rude in its actuality, turned for its outlet to a perfectly disembodied world, the shadow-world of Emerson, Hawthorne, and Poe, a world fastidiously intellectual in which only two colors exist, white and black. Whitman was the Antæus of this tradition who touched earth with it and gave it hands and feet. For having all the ideas of New England, being himself saturated with Emersonianism, he came up from the other side with everything New England did not possess: quantities of rude emotion and a faculty of gathering humane experience almost as great as that of the hero of the Odyssey. Living habitually among world ideas, world emotions, world impulses and having experienced life on a truly grand scale, this extraordinary person, innocent as a pioneer of what is called urbanity, became nevertheless a man of the world in a sense in which ambassadors are not; and there is every reason to suppose that he would have been perfectly at home in the company of Achilles, or Erasmus, or Louis XIV.

This fact is full of meaning, and if any one doubts it let him dwell on the following record in *Specimen Days*. Whitman is describing what he did in the military hospitals at Washington during the war:

"For reading I generally have some old pictorial magazines or story papers — they are always acceptable. . . . In these wards, or on the field, as I thus continue to go round, I have come to adapt myself to each emergency, after its kind or call, however trivial, however solemn, every one justified and made real under its circumstances — not only visits and cheering talk and little gifts — not only washing and dressing wounds . . . but passages from the Bible, expounding them, . . . etc. (I think I see my friends smiling at this confession, but I was never more in earnest in my life.) In camp and elsewhere, I was in the habit of reading or giving recitations to the men. They were very fond of it, and liked declamatory pieces. We would gather in a large group by ourselves after supper, and spend the time in such readings, or in talking, and occasionally by an amusing game called the game of twenty questions."

This passage will serve very well to mark the distinction between Whitman and all the

other American men of letters of his time. Could Emerson have recited "declamatory pieces," even if it was at the moment the one tactful thing to do? Could Bryant have led a game of twenty questions? Could Edgar Allan Poe have expounded the Bible? Could Whittier have juggled with oranges? Could Lowell have pointed out the felicities that lurk in the pictorial adventures of Nick Carter and the Wharf Rats? Could any one of them, in short, have entered so fully and many-sidedly into the spirit of a great human situation? But allowing for certain inevitable differences in the *milieu* (orange-juggling and the adventures of Nick Carter being peculiarly democratic and modern), I am sure that Achilles, or Erasmus, or Louis XIV could have done so; and this is why I have called Whitman a man of the world.

It was in these ways that he gained his experience, in these ways that he shared it. And it is the more remarkable since he had sprung from the most provincial, inadaptable, homespun stock, his aspect being, as Edmund

Gosse remembers it, like that of a plain old deal table, scrubbed and scrubbed and scrubbed. He let in the air of a wider world on those inadequate decencies; he came home to his own traditions like a prodigal son, visiting for a while, mingling an element of indulgent pity in his new sense of the limited old ways, aware of a few confidences that could not be shared any more and of so many things, human, too, which could find no place there. To compare the particular homeliness of Whitman with the homeliness, for example, of *Snow-Bound* is at once to recall his line "There was a child went forth."

And he challenged the abnormal dignity of American letters. The dignity of letters! It is a question how much dignity letters can afford to have. No doubt in the perennial indignity of our world a considerable emphasis on that becomes all too easily the price of self-preservation. The possession of culture with us has always been rather a jealous possession, it has the nature of a right which has been earned, an investment which might

have been a yacht, a country-house, or a collection of Rembrandts instead.

All this was especially true of the New York men of letters who formed the background of Whitman: Stedman, Stoddard, and their group. The eighteenth century was never so meticulous about form, style, presentableness as were these men. Style to them was a quite sacred thing, bought and paid for, as it were; and for them the essence of literature lay in its remoteness from Wall Street. Witness the poem in which Stedman, in order to lift the scene of his daily avocations to the level of literature, achieved the incredible ineptitude of getting the god Pan into it. They had the temperament of collectors, viveurs, connoisseurs of one generation; they understood and they emulated the fragile and the far-sought; and Whitman came in upon them thundering and with his coat off, like an inconvenient country uncle, puddling their artistic expectations. Could anything have been more disconcerting than his Olympian summary of what he calls the

" endless supply of small coin . . . the dandies and ennuyées who flood us with their thin sentiment of parlors, parasols, piano-songs, tinkling rhymes, the five-hundredth importation — or whimpering and crying about something, chasing one aborted conceit after another, and forever occupied in dyspeptic amours with dyspeptic women "— when, faced with this, he dwells only on a certain substantial grandeur in the mountains of white paper and the crashing, ten-cylinder presses which turn them out?

Whitman — how else can I express it? — precipitated the American character. All those things which had been separate, self-sufficient, incoördinate — action, theory, idealism, business — he cast into a crucible; and they emerged, harmonious and molten, in a fresh democratic ideal, which is based upon the whole personality. Every strong personal impulse, every coöperating and unifying impulse, everything that enriches the social background, everything that enriches the individual, everything that impels and clari-

fies in the modern world owes something to Whitman. And especially of those American writers who have written preëminently for young men — and which has not? — Whitman alone, it seems to me, has pitched his tone to the real spring of action in them.

All this indicates a function quite different from that of a poet in any but the most radical and primitive sense of the word (the sense in which it was held by Whitman himself), a man, that is to say, who first gives to a nation a certain focal centre in the consciousness of its own character. Virgil did this, Mazzini did this, Björnson did this; and it was the main work of Whitman to make fast what he called "the idea and fact of American Totality," an idea and fact summed up with singular completeness in his own character and way of life. Emerson before him had provided a kind of skeleton outline; but what Emerson drew in black and white Whitman filled in with color and set in three dimensions.

A *focal centre* — that is the first requisite

of a great people. And by this I do not mean the sense of national or imperial destiny which has consolidated the great temporal Powers of history. I mean that national "point of rest," to adopt a phrase in which Coleridge indicated that upon which the harmony of a work of art is founded and to which everything in the composition is more or less unconsciously referred; that secure and unobtrusive element of national character, taken for granted, and providing a certain underlying coherence and background of mutual understanding which Rome, for example, had in everything the name of Cato called up, or England in her great remembered worthies, or the elder Germany in Martin Luther. "National culture," to speak in the dialect of our own time, is only the perhaps too-conscious equivalent of this element in which everything admirably characteristic of a people sums itself up, which creates everywhere a kind of spiritual team-work, which radiates outward and articulates the entire living fabric of a race.

For us, it seems to me, Whitman laid the cornerstone of a national ideal capable in this way of releasing personality and of retrieving for our civilization, originally deficient in the richer juices of human nature, and still further bled and flattened out by the Machine Process, the only sort of "place in the sun" really worth having.

But at this point one has to discriminate. The social ideal of Whitman is essentially a collection of raw materials, molten and malleable, which take shape only in an emotional form. This emotional attitude is at bottom the attitude of a perfectly free personality, naturally affirmative, naturally creative; the rude material of right personal instinct, which is, however, antecedent to the direction personality is to adopt and to the ideas that are to inform it.

To ignore this distinction, as most of the direct disciples of Whitman have done, is to go wrong utterly. And in fact Whitman himself ignored the distinction, and himself went wrong. Perfectly right in all his in-

stincts, perfectly right so long as he kept to the plane of instinct, he was lost on the plane of ideas. He lacked a sure sense of his own province and limitations. Influenced no doubt by his disciples, he began in later years to assume functions not properly his own, and the greatness and sweetness of his character were increasingly marred by much pomposity and fatuousness. He was led to speak not as a poet but as an authority, the painful results of which may be seen in his newspaper interviews.

All this was probably inevitable. Whitman's instinct was to affirm everything, to accept everything, to relish the personal and human elements in everything. For himself he accepted "sustenance, clothing, shelter, and continuity." As regards the world he was equally catholic and passive. Soldiers being the strapping upright animals they are he accepts armies because armies breed them. He enjoys an old restauranteur because he knows how to select champagne, likes to look at nursemaids because they are so trim and

wholesome and at fashionable women because they are so pretty and gay, likes money because of a certain strength it implies and business because it is so active, nimble, and adventurous. On the plane of instinct where he properly belongs he is right in each case: on the plane of ideas the practical effect is that, in accepting everything, he accepts the confusion of things and the *fait accompli*.

It is, in fact, the simple corollary of his thorough-going mood of affirmation on the personal, instinctive, emotional plane, that his ideas should be perfectly conventional. In ideas he is just an old-fashioned Jacksonian democrat. Except for a certain amount of uncommonly vigorous criticism, of the stock type, on American abuses, he never questions the old institutions. He takes for granted "the unform'd and nebulous state of many things, not yet permanently settled, but agreed on all hands to be the preparations of an infinitely greater future." He talks the greatest amount of nonsense about the "feudalism" of a contemporary Europe whose

principal artists have been men like Tolstoi, Dostoievski, Millet, Thomas Hardy. He is never able to release himself from the vicious comparative; he is morbid about geography. Not being satisfied by the greatness of anything as a positive fact he has to prove its greatness by belittling something else. A fertile plain strikes him at once as more fertile than any other plain on earth, a grand scene " outvies all the historic places of note," an American general is more of a general than Napoleon, an American poem has to be better than any poem hitherto.

All this is just what Mr. Bryan says,— it is just our fun. And the funniest thing of all, from this point of view, is to find Whitman solemnly posed, as he records it, before a vast canvas twenty feet by twelve, representing " Custer's Last Rally," the work of one John Mulvany; finding its " physiognomy realistic and Western," with an " almost entire absence of the stock traits of European war pictures," and recommending that it be sent to Paris " to show Messieur Crapeau [*sic*] that

some things can be done in America as well as others." Perhaps one has to be an American to feel the lovableness of that scene. But if it demonstrates once for all any one thing it is that Whitman was never intended to be an authority, even on democracy.

An opportunity and in certain respects also a faculty Whitman had, in his own time and place, very similar to those of Montaigne. I mean by this, on the one hand, a malleable and still incoherent race to be interpreted to itself, to be articulated, to be brought into focus, and on the other a temperament archetypical of that race, a range of sympathy coincidental with it, and a power of revealing and in a sense fixing the racial norm. "I look within myself, I am only concerned with myself, I reflect on myself, I examine myself, I take pleasure in myself," said Montaigne; and all France for the first time saw itself in a looking-glass and fell together in a common discipline.

The raw materials of a racial norm Whitman provided; but — and in this he resem-

bled Emerson — he was too passive to go further. He assembled in himself and his writings the characteristics of America,— with him originated the most contagious, the most liberating, the most unifying of native impulses; but he failed to react upon them, to mould them, and to drive them home. He had no ideas and he was satisfied to have none. He wanted, above all, intensity. He was too complacent. He was incapable of discipline and he did not see that discipline is, for Americans, the condition of all forward movement.

But the conventionality of Whitman's intellectual equipment is not, for us, a necessary part of the personal attitude which he originated. History is filled with instances of men who, having been called upon to originate fresh points of view, have had, in order to establish these points of view, to adopt a severely conventional position toward most of the phenomena of their time. Each of these men has had his disciples in the letter and his disciples in the spirit,— Martin Luther, for

example, especially in questions economic and social. The direct and immediate children of Luther, those who have laid apostolic hands on one another from generation to generation, are simply the bourgeoisie of the world; but the true Lutherans are those who, in every age, have thought keenly and honestly and independently and have, in so doing, contributed stone by stone to the great catholicism of the future. So also with Whitman and the children of Whitman. It was inevitable, in the America of his time, that he should have been so much of an outrageous egoist (consider the provocation!), inevitable that he should, in Emerson's phrase, have swallowed the universe like a cake, inevitable that he should have been indiscriminating, confused, and a little fatuous. To affirm sufficiently, he had to affirm everything.

We are in a different position, and we have different responsibilities. On the philosophical side, the simple doctrine of evolution, in its crude form the last word in Whitman's cosmos, has been refined and ripened.

Above all, we have no excuse not to see that affirmation, in the most real sense, proceeds to a certain extent through rejection, by merely dropping off most of the old clothes that Whitman found quite good enough. To keep these old clothes, to affirm that since everything is good they must be good also, to embroider them and make them over and stalk about in them, loudly affirming one's own ego and the indiscriminate grandeur of all creation, with particular reference to the Whole Crowd of Good Americans — all this is not to continue and to reaffirm the right Whitmanian tradition; but it is, in a way, to have the sanction of Whitman's own character and experience, and it is above all to do what the typical contemporary Whitmanian does.

In some way — and primarily by returning upon Whitman as Whitman returned upon Emerson, not, as in that case, by adding emotion to intellect, but by adding intellect to emotion — the social ideal the raw materials

of which have been provided by Whitman must be formulated and driven home.

The Whitmanians, meanwhile, have made haste to formulate out of these materials a certain number of spurious social ideals, the more dangerous the more plausible, and even the more "American," they are. Of these the one that seems to me most typical will have to be examined.

Apotheosis of the "Lowbrow"

IV

APOTHEOSIS OF THE "LOWBROW"

I

The particular Whitmanian I have in mind is Mr. Gerald Stanley Lee; and the particular social ideal is Mr. Lee's "Inspired Millionaire."

Now it must be admitted at the outset that if the social ideal which Mr. Lee has set up is in reality a spurious one, its plausibility is largely due to the fact that in certain ways it seems to be precisely the social ideal that is most needed. It is an ideal which touches reality, it involves the American character as we really know it, it throws into relief certain quite fundamental issues, it attempts to create an outlet through which the American character can express itself in a disinterested way; and finally it is based on that conception of a

nonchalant individual, " superbly aplomb and mutual," which Whitman once for all invented as the democratic type. Just as Carlyle's Hero can be taken as a projection of what the typical Englishman, possibly, aspires to be, a sort of Lord Cromer with a halo, just as Nietzsche's Superman is a projection of what the typical modern German seems to be struggling to be, a sort of Bismarck with a halo, so Mr. Lee's Inspired Millionaire is a projection of what the typical American apparently struggles to be, a sort of Marshall Field with a halo. It is the type toward which the personal forces of the generality of Americans appear to be directed, heightened and justified as an ideal.

In all these respects, then, Mr. Lee seems to have done just the one preliminary thing that has to be done. Why then, really, has he entirely failed to do it? How, as I believe, has he made it more difficult than ever for any one to do it?

The idealization of business, to begin with, has, in America, a certain apparent rightness

which elsewhere it could not have. For business in America is not merely more engaging than elsewhere, it is even perhaps the most engaging activity in American life. You cannot compare the American commercial type with the commercial type which England has evolved without feeling in the latter a certain fatty degeneration, a solemn fatality, a sanctified, legalized self-satisfaction, which our agile, free, open, though sometimes indefinitely more unholy type, is quite without; for even in his unholiness the unholy business man in America is engagingly crooked rather than ponderously corrupt. Beside the English business man as one figures him at those portentous Guildhall banquets which array themselves like a Chinese wall of roast beef against every impulse in human life that moves and breathes, beside the English business man as he is apotheosized in the Lord Mayor of London (led by that symbolic coachman of his as a wingèd victory), with his chains and decorations, the liveries that fortify him, the legalities and charters of pri-

vate liberty that sanction him, the immemorial precedents that fix him foursquare and firm in his encumbered world — beside him the American business man is a gay, sprightly, childlike being, moved and movable, the player of a game, a sportsman essentially, though with a frequently dim perception of the rules. You have only to compare the Bank of England, that squat impregnable mass which grips a score of London acres, with, for example, the Woolworth Tower, which has in it so much of the impulse that has built cathedrals, to feel this divergence in the quality of English and American business.

What is the natural history of this divergence? Why, precisely that the world of trade in England has always been an underworld, precisely that everything which is light, gay, disinterested, personal, artistic has held aloof from it, has been able to form a self-subsisting world which is beyond it, while trade itself is only a dull residuum. The cream has risen to the top, and the world of business is perfectly conscious that it is only

skimmed milk; and if the aldermen wax fat and reach for money it is in a spirit that Americans would call defiance and despair. For in America there has been no such separation of the cream and the milk. Business has traditionally absorbed the best elements of the American character, it has been cowed by no sense of subjection, it has thriven in a free air, it has received all the leaven, it has occupied the centre of the field. Just those elements which in other countries produce art and literature, formulate the ideals and methods of philosophy and sociology, think and act for those disinterested ends which make up the meaning of life; just that free, disinterested, athletic sense of play which is precisely the same in dialectic, in art, in religion, in sociology, in sport — just these, relatively speaking, have in America been absorbed in trade. It is not remarkable that, on the one hand, thought and literature are so perfunctory and so barren; while on the other business is so seductive, so charming, so gay an adventure,— not remarkable,

for instance, that Mr. Lee is really able to imagine "a million dollars having a good time, i. e., a million dollars full of creative imagination."

Yet though trade may have all the grace and charm of sportsmanship, and all the fervor of a religion, though it may express itself in the most beautiful buildings, though it may stimulate the imagination, though it may turn a factory into an earthly paradise, can it really have the essential quality of religion, sport, and art, can it be at bottom, that is to say, disinterested? So long as the impulse which underlies trade is not that of an exchange of equivalent values, but of an exchange which gets more than it gives and gets as much more as it can, just so long trade cannot be disinterested, and the problem of private subsistence in trade is inevitably bound up with the problem of arbitrary self-interest all the way up and down the scale. Mr. Lee wants his Inspired Millionaire to be an artist, and he defines an artist as one who "loves making a perfect thing more than making

money." He wants his Inspired Millionaire to be an inventive man and he says that "inventive men are apt to be dreamers and they are given to being disinterested and to not defending themselves, and they are whimsical and reckless"— statements in which Mr. Lee is very careless of reason; for although it may be possible to be disinterested after one has become a millionaire, it is quite impossible, except through inheritance (which is outside the present question), to be disinterested during the process of becoming one.

This want of logic is very damaging to Mr. Lee when he sets up his Inspired Millionaire as what he calls the only alternative to socialism, for in the second part of his book, "which considers ways and means," he unconsciously reverses his position and gives his whole scheme away. He there shows that in actually bringing about the ideal industrial system he hopes for, it is not the monopolist who conceives "a million dollars as an art form" and who, like every artist, must have a free hand in working out his conception, it

is not the millionaire that will have to be inspired, but the salaried superintendent:

"The practical difficulty in many cases is not in the condition of the men, nor of the man, who might be superintendent, but in the millionaire. The millionaire finds, as a matter of experience, that the kind of man he would really like for the position of manager is a man who cannot quite be managed. Then he tries to manage him. The real trouble is with the millionaire. He has had it proved to him, over and over again, that the men that can be managed cannot manage any one else. And when it comes to making an actual choice between a second-rate superintendent who can be controlled by money, and the man of the highest order of gifts who is controlled by his own gifts, the millionaire chooses the second-rate superintendent. . . . The man who sees things cannot be had except by men who will let him do them. . . . He has the spirit and the attitude of the artist and the only kind of money that in the long run controls him is the money that buys the whole of him, buys the man and his ideas together, on the condition that he shall carry them out. . . . The time is not far off when it will be generally taken for granted by all concerned that the controlling factor, the strategic position in industry, instead of belonging to the man who has the money, or

to the man who does the work, belongs to the superintendent, the man who has the ideas, the great faiths of the business — who is the soul of the business, who holds the owners, and the men, and the plant in his hands, and is putting them together."

One reads this fairly intelligent description of socialism with some perplexity as to what Mr. Lee is going to do about it: certainly from the point of view of the private monopolist he is preaching the starkest anarchism all along the line. For if, as he says, the strategic position belongs to the superintendent whose income, however large, remains a salary, and if the only way in which the millionaire can get his ideas expressed is by giving free rein to the ideas of the superintendent (who, in turn, as Mr. Lee urges, can only get *his* ideas expressed by giving free rein to the ideas of all his men), how in the first place can the millionaire behind the superintendent remain an "artist" whose own free will is all-determining, and why may not the superintendent as readily accept his salary from the State? And then, too, in a

society where the real industrial inventors have only by accident gained fortunes by their invention, where many fortunes are made by the wholly uninventive methods of the Stock Exchange, where the real owners are the innumerable anonymous owners of stock and drawers of dividend whose capital is, as Mr. Lee says, "huge, pulpy, helpless, unmanned" — in such a society how can the increased economic individualism which Mr. Lee proposes discern the millionaires that *are* inventive and assure them fortunes (or rather the superintendents who hold the strategic position and whose ideas the millionaires must give free rein to), how can it suppress and repudiate the millionaires that are uninventive, how can it create inventiveness in the innumerable army of anonymous owners? Having given his account of socialism, Mr. Lee has merely summoned out of it a vast, vaporous, irrelevant Somebody, who has no connection with anything and who would really be very much left out in the cold if

there were not so many hospitable people to take him in, "regardless."

But the force of a book like this does not rest in its intellectual structure; as Mr. Lee observes in his appendix, the book is a conception and the point in it cannot be proved by an argument. Argument, I grant, is quite as irrelevant to the conception of an Inspired Millionaire as it is to the conception of a Superman. But then Mr. Lee has opened himself to it, he has used an argument, he has deliberately devoted five chapters to considering ways and means; and his argument is precisely counter to his main conception. His Millionaire is a sort of silly Goliath struck down by the pebble of his own logic. Just because Nietzsche was a poet he never opened himself to an argument, he never dreamed of considering ways and means; that is why the Superman, however questionable on other grounds, is a conceivable and a permanent ideal. The fact that Mr. Lee has had to resort to argument is the first thing that leads

one to suspect the validity of the conception itself.

If the conception is a true one, says Mr. Lee, the world will soon find a body for it. When was the world ever so particular about truth? It is the big battalions that find a body for notions of this kind, and these Mr. Lee has already captured.

Now it is no more an argument against Mr. Lee's philosophy that business men are flattered by it than it is an argument against Carlyle that the English aristocracy of his day were flattered by him or against Nietzsche that the Bismarckians and militarists and little supermen of modern Germany have been flattered by him. Every social ideal has formed itself out of the stuff of some nation, has grown up as the reflex and better half of its dominant moral type, and has apparently justified the type on its lower levels. The real question with any social ideal is not whether it seems to be embodied and debased in any existing class, but whether or not it provides a possible moral pro-

gramme for the individual, a way of looking at life, a point of view.

One may find the Superman a very objectionable ideal, but one has to admit that the Superman's unmorality is itself a moral attitude, a moral programme, a point of view; one may find Carlyle's Hero a ludicrously unscientific and unhistorical ideal, but one has to admit that the Hero considered as the interpreter of a reality which lies behind phenomena constitutes a moral attitude, a moral programme, a point of view. Making every allowance for a possible absurdity in genius, they are both conceivable social ideals. Is the Inspired Millionaire, who has failed so unhappily to establish himself by logic, a conceivable social ideal? Is there, as Mr. Lee says, "no difference between making a fortune and making a book or a picture"?

The one reply is simply that millionairism is itself not a moral entity like heroism or superhumanity: it is a situation, and a situation moreover which is not the inevitable re-

sult of any kind of activity, even the activity of a genius for acquisition.

What remains? Everything, unhappily, since the Ass's Head of business to which Mr. Lee plays the part of Titania is interested neither in the truth of logic nor in the truth of poetry. What remains is the very evident new life which Mr. Lee's Apotheosis of the "Lowbrow" has infused into everything that makes honest thinking in America so nearly impossible. Idealism is the most dangerous thing in the world when, having no basis in reason or in pressure, it serves merely to give a transcendental *cachet* to the established fact. And Mr. Lee's flattery is really very subtle; he is keen enough to say all manner of disagreeable things about Mr. Rockefeller, clever enough to make fine distinctions about the futility of Mr. Carnegie, leaving the anonymous "morally beautiful grocer" (who is in fact simply the universal business man, only too glad to feel himself more beautifully moral than the captains of his type) in possession of a philosophy which enables him to

patronize St. Paul, St. Francis of Assisi, and all the art, thought, and literature of the world, as he was only too well prepared to do before. In a world where everything is relative it is probably too much to expect that sincerity should be absolute. When Mr. Lee says that not failure or martyrdom or military glory any longer but "success of any kind at any price is what we really worship, and as we are convinced just now that money, instead of being a possible accompaniment or accident of success, is the way to get it, we are worshiping money. We are all idealists"— when he says this, we remind ourselves that Mr. Lee is himself a disinterested thinker, we admit that his definition of a new idealism has the charm of surprise, we hesitate long enough to ask ourselves whether it is really possible in this way to "carry the war into the enemy's country," before we are suddenly overcome by this base ignorance of economic facts, this base perversion of economic issues, this base misuse of the elements of surprise and exaltation, this deliberate

sophistication of the one universally diffused point of view which has paralyzed American life and poisoned the wells of all disinterested thought.

To be a prophet in America it is not enough to be totally uninformed; one must also have a bland smile.

II

But now I feel that I owe a certain explanation for making so much of a book which, after all, so few can have read or taken seriously as a social document. (How really tragic it is to consider that even if it had been all that some of the slightly less inspired millionaires have thought it, it could still, since there is in America no criterion by which to test the validity of ideas, have penetrated only an inch deep and must quickly have been forgotten!)

Inspired Millionaires, for all that, seems to me a landmark and a touchstone. For it is in the direct line of the American tradition, it is the climax of our old Transcendental indi-

vidualism, and bringing as it does this Transcendentalism into line with contemporary life it enables us to see just how far our American blood has played us false. And then too if, owing to his having uncritically accepted this false philosophical basis (owing to his familiar assumption that "America" is an altogether special and abstract thing, with a divine right and divine instincts all its own) — if, owing to all this, Mr. Lee, as I think, has gone wrong from the outset, he has at least attempted something which scarcely any one else has attempted, something which is almost a prerequisite of any further progress, the examination of American society in the light of a social ideal which is itself really American in its traits and in its origin. For the Inspired Millionaire springs, like the flower of the century plant, right out of the apparent heart, right out of the apparent centre, of American society.

The *apparent* centre, I say, because although business is plainly the centre of attraction, I think it could easily be shown so to be

only through the want of such an animating motive as a genuine social ideal provides. For if, in the first place, millionairism is not a moral entity and the Inspired Millionaire consequently is not a conceivable social ideal, if moreover trade itself cannot be in essence a disinterested thing, only consider what is involved in the very plausibility of Mr. Lee's theme, in the sportsmanship, the fervor, the charm that actually exist in American business! Only consider the meaning of such a paradox as that the mind of a nation is given over, in a potentially disinterested mood, to an essentially self-interested activity! Only consider that the Will to Reform, negative as it is, has sprung spontaneously out of the welter of business itself! Only consider how much disinterestedness all this, at bottom, amounts to! Who can say what would happen in America if some direct and positive outlet, some outlet normal to the disinterested mood, as the Will to Reform is not, were provided for all this energy that has taken the wrong switch? Who can say what would

happen if some one were to appear with a social ideal just as concrete as Mr. Lee's and just as much an answer to the experience of the American people, only genuine, central, honestly thought, honestly felt?

More generally Mr. Lee is to be taken as one of a large group of Windy Philosophers who have swarmed all over the twentieth century. Scratch any one of them and you will find an ex-parson or an ex-professor: they include perhaps a majority of those Americans who, having some capacity for general ideas, have detached themselves from the universities, the professions, the parties, and the conventional life of the time. It is this general class of minds which forms the leaven of thought in other countries; even with us almost every one of them is a man of insight, associated (equivocally for the most part) with the best current ideas; but every one of them rides his broomstick through the intense inane, sublimely irresponsible, expansively fraternal, infinitely futile.

Consider Mr. Lee in this light. Consider

what it means to American society that a man should win even the position he has who thinks on three or four levels at once, who is at one moment fifty years ahead of his time and at the next four hundred years behind it, who imagines one thing and thinks another and says a third! Consider what it means that a man of even Mr. Lee's degree of prominence, who sees eye to eye with socialism the chaos of the industrial world and the need of just that free inventiveness in all grades which is paralyzed by the pressure of profit and dividend, who suggests some of the most interesting, stimulating, indispensable problems of socialism, who, being intelligent enough for this, simply because he is isolated and ill-informed and out-of-touch with contemporary thought, because he is immensely hindered by his abstract notion of America and his Yankee instincts of any sort of individualism at any price, because he is enormously sentimental, should repudiate socialism, in an unintelligent formula, as "a machine from the outside"! If Mr. Lee's

logic and imagination bring him directly into the socialist camp while his Inspired Millionaire is merely a very noisy, windy, raucous, popular Æolian attachment, it is not so much socialism that is in danger as the very possibility in America of any sort of clear, just, intelligent, well-informed thinking.

How much talent goes to waste every day, it seems, simply because there is no criticism, no standard, no authority to trip it up and shake it and make it think! On the one hand we have the unwillingness and the incapacity of the self-interested financialized brain to extend itself to general ideas; on the other a soft, undisciplined emotionality face to face with crowds, millionaires, prairies, and skyscrapers — an open sea with plenty of wind for the great American balloon.

III

Since, in the matter which immediately concerns the most and the best Americans (for any one in his five senses must agree with Mr. Lee that most of the really first-rate forces in

America have been and still are absorbed in business), since in this matter, and in consequence of this fact, America is so palpably superior to England, perhaps it may be pointed out how in the matter of ideas, and especially in the half-unconscious machinery that makes ideas tell, England is equally superior to America — and why, as a result of this, the problem of England is in certain fundamental respects more hopeful than the problem of America. For certainly the main work of society is to build that garden in the cosmic wilderness, as Huxley (best and brightest of the Philistines) described it; conceiving society deliberately as a work of art which is at war with nature, fertilizing the soil, cultivating and protecting the most beautiful and the greatest variety of plants, aware all the time that every moment we lay aside our tools or lose sight of our ever-developing design the weeds will pour back again and the wilderness will by so much have gained on us.

The only education which can forward this plan is the education which teaches us what a

weed is and what a flower is. And the only superiority which England has over America — a relative but a great superiority — is that England really has the rudiments of a sort of botanical laboratory of this kind. It has a few men who are skilled in recognizing weeds and in appreciating flowers and who are gradually building up a comprehensive design. While, just because (unlike political economists) they know they are dealing with human material, with infinitely variegated and ever-changing material, they are far too sensible to confuse their study with an exact science, they have, I insist, most of the advantages of an exact science; that is to say, standing on a common level, they know where they are, their common rejections correspond roughly to rejections by evidence, they build on rejections, and they keep their minds open toward the front. Having in mind the people as a whole, and every cross-section of the mind of the people (not merely the cross-section that has to do with them as "producers" or "consumers"), they feel each beat of the pulse;

they know what Methodism stands for, or the appearance of a new poet, or a Welsh festival, or an Irish Theatre, or a General Strike, or the statistics of unemployment, or a new book on political theory.

This open, ventilated, sceptical, sympathetic centrality of theirs articulates the whole life of the people, and incidentally as a matter of course expresses itself through legislation. More than one English book by an unknown writer has, within two years and owing to this diffused sense of the hierarchy of ideas, penetrated Parliament, convinced it, and been at once and universally translated into action. Utopian event, which an innocent person might suppose the natural course of things in the most rudimentary legislature!

Of course nobody dreams of expecting anything like that with us; and then too, as Mr. Lee observes, "we do not want to take time ourselves to be always climbing up to the Senate. We do not even want to watch it, and the last thing we would enjoy as live busy people would be standing there on the height

or on the look-off, day after day, seeing for everybody. We have our own special things to do that we like to do best, and what a democracy is for is to let us do them." I am sure that every true American heart beats to that sentiment; I am sure that every true American only longs to be allowed to go on being live and busy and not seeing for everybody and letting his governors get inspired mysteriously by the still small voice, while the Stars and Stripes do all the rest.

England, to be sure, is just as much the wilderness as America. All I am urging is that while England has at least a handful of trained gardeners, we have nothing but cowboys and a flag.

The Sargasso Sea

V

THE SARGASSO SEA

I

"The fiddles are tuning as it were all over America." This is a remark of the best, the youngest, and the most Irish of all good Americans, Mr. J. B. Yeats. It is true that under the glassy, brassy surface of American jocosity and business there is a pulp and a quick, and this pulpy quick, this nervous and acutely self-critical vitality, is in our day in a strange ferment. A fresh and more sensitive emotion seems to be running up and down even the old Yankee backbone — that unblossoming stalk.

I am speaking myself as a thorough-going Yankee to other thorough-going Yankees,— as a "little American" (to adopt a phrase which, as time goes on, will prove more and

more useful). For to find this ferment in the immigrant folk of one, two, or three generations is in itself only natural and the effect of a more vivid, instinctive, and vital civilization in their own past. The importation of radical ideas and the ferment of radical ideas which have been imported scarcely touch, it seems to me, the centre of the American problem. So far as we are concerned, the sea-crossing, to begin with, has a very dampening effect on the gunpowder contained in them. Transplanted they have at once the pleasing remoteness of literature and the stir of an only half-apprehended actuality; they become admirably safe, they become even delightful. In the American mind Nietzsche and A. C. Benson — the lion and the lamb — lie down quite peacefully together, chewing the cud of culture. To get civilization out of the Yankee stock — *ex forte dulcitudo* — is the more arduous and the more inspiriting enterprise. Is it possible? Is it in process? The signs are anything but obvious: one has to keep quite still and hold one's ear close to

the ground to hear the sap stirring and the little half-inconsequential voices that whisper and breathe in the intervals of bombast and business. For there is nothing so shy and so puzzled as the fine Puritan temperament face to face with a free world.

If something vibrates in the air it is without doubt the expectation of a social ideal that shall act upon us as the sun acts upon a photographic plate, that shall work as a magnet upon all these energies which are on the point of being released. But the formulation of a social ideal can only be the work of a wiser head and a riper heart than we have yet seen; and we have had, meanwhile, quite enough of the egoism which, with foolish head and unripe heart, has undertaken this intoxicating function.

If it is for the State to weed out the incentives to private gain, it is for us meanwhile simultaneously to build up other incentives to replace them. These incentives must be personal. They must not spring from floating, evanescent ideals, political, spiritualistic, or

other; they must touch the primitive instincts which are touched by the incentives they replace. Emerson gave us the Over-Soul; Catholicism gave us the Madonna and the Bambino; — which has really touched the religious sense of mankind?

II

America is like a vast Sargasso Sea — a prodigious welter of unconscious life, swept by ground-swells of half-conscious emotion. All manner of living things are drifting in it, phosphorescent, gayly colored, gathered into knots and clotted masses, gelatinous, unformed, flimsy, tangled, rising and falling, floating and merging, here an immense distended belly, there a tiny rudimentary brain (the gross devouring the fine) — everywhere an unchecked, uncharted, unorganized vitality like that of the first chaos. It is a welter of life which has not been worked into an organism, into which fruitful values and standards of humane economy have not been introduced, innocent of those laws of social gravi-

tation which, rightly understood and pursued with a keen faith, produce a fine temper in the human animal.

Now as everybody knows there was a time when the actual Sargasso Seas were, to the consciousness of science, just in this uncharted state. The creatures they contain, instead of being studied with reference to an organic unity of which they were all modifications, were divided into certain fixed subkingdoms according as they superficially resembled one another; here a group with soft bodies, there a group whose organs were disposed about a centre, and the like. It was, I think, Huxley who first exposed the superficiality of this method and who began the grouping of creatures according to real identity in structure.

American society, so to speak, is in this pre-Darwinian state. It is filled with "groups" which have long ceased to mean anything, which do not stand for living issues, which do not engage personal energies. A Democrat is no more a genuine type than one

of the pre-Darwinian Mollusca, so called because they had soft bodies; a Republican is no more a genuine type than the Radiata, so called because their organs were disposed about a centre. The superficial characteristics of the types remain — that is to say, Democrats generally *have* soft bodies, and Republicans *do* believe in centralization — but the fruitful elements of a group have departed from them: they no longer touch personal instincts, they no longer possess the life which impels to personal action.

The recognized divisions of opinion, the recognized issues, the recognized causes in American society are extinct. And although Patriotism, Democracy, the Future, Liberty are still the undefined, unexamined, unapplied catchwords over which the generality of our public men dilate, enlarge themselves, and float (careful thought and intellectual contact still remaining on the level of engineering, finance, advertising, and trade) — while this remains true, every one feels that the issues

represented by them are no longer genuine or adequate.

The most striking American spectacle today is a fumbling about after new issues which no one as yet has been able to throw into relief. We have seen one President advocating a "New Nationalism," another President advocating a "New Freedom," a well-known novelist talking about a "New Patriotism" — phrases which illustrate just this vague fumbling, this acute consciousness of the inadequacy of the habitual issues, this total inability to divine and formulate new issues that really are issues. With us the recognized way of pinning down something that is felt to be in the air is to adopt some cast-off phrase and tack the word "New" before it. A pleasant thrill then runs over the country, something which is vaguely felt to be new having been recognized and labeled as new, and the issue itself is quietly smothered (or springs forth divinely haloed as a Currency Bill).

The truth is that it signifies nothing for politicians to import social issues into the plane of politics, even if they import the whole of socialism into politics, so long as they and we fail to recognize that the centre of gravity in American affairs has shifted wholly from the plane of politics to the plane of psychology and morals. So long as we fail to recognize this, politics can only continue the old endless unfruitful seesaw of corruption and reform. That is why catchwords like the "New Nationalism" and the "New Freedom" are really so much farther from the centre of gravity than catchwords like "Highbrow" and "Lowbrow," or "Bromide" and "Sulphite." The latter lead nowhither, but they at least explain things. "Are you a Bromide?" may be a silly vulgar question, but it is by no means a silly vulgar fact that a whole population should go about putting that question. It is a fact that grows in meaning when you consider that not so much as a remnant of the American people can go about *thinking* any

question that stands for a social and psychological issue which cuts deeper than that.

It is pathetic, it is very nearly tragic. How much hunger is represented by all these "New" things which give the American public such a quantity of gaseated water to stay their appetites? How much of a real psychological curiosity miscarries at the outset in questions like "Are you a Bromide?" American slang in general, alive with psychological interest in a rudimentary state, is the most mournful tribute to a vitality in the American people, missing fire in a million trivialities, because it has not been engaged by issues which really touch home in the personality, because — to put it the other way round — the catchwords of American society are not themselves personal.

For it may as well be understood that the human race will have catchwords and will not budge without them. Consequently it makes all the difference to a people and an age whether its catchwords really do or do not correspond with convictions, and whether

these convictions really do or do not reach down among the real problems of personal and social life — whether they really *catch* at the bottom of things, like a dredging-machine, or whether they merely scrape along the bottom or stir up the water or ruffle the surface. Home Rule, No Taxation without Representation, the Right of Private Judgment, the Three Unities, are catchwords which have played an immense part in the world of thought and action, because they have stood for genuine causes, genuine issues in religion, in politics, in art. The rank and file who grasp the idea behind them incompletely and in varying degrees and who, if they depended on their understanding of the idea, would be at sixes and sevens, grasp the catchword and unite on a common platform which, if the catchword is a worthy one, educates them through action. Every leader will have his catchword: his philosophy will be a "Synthetic" philosophy, his ideal will be the "Superman," his *bête noir* will be the "Servile" state, and the generality of men

will fall in line according to whether the connotations of these catchwords do or do not strike home to their own personal preferences. For generations the test of a living society, a living philosophy or art, will be whether or not the catchwords it flings forth really correspond with profound divisions of type, deeply felt issues, genuine convictions, in whichever field, between — I was going to say — some good and some evil. But these words are so unfashionable that if I use them I shall certainly alienate any Advanced Person who honors these pages with a glance.

But it makes no difference how many games of pea-and-thimble philosophy may play, wherever the thimble is put down the problem of good and evil is the pea that lies under it; and the happiest excitement in life is to be convinced that one is fighting for all one is worth on behalf of some clearly seen and deeply felt good and against some greatly scorned evil. To quicken and exhilarate the life of one's own people — as Heine and Nietzsche did in Germany, as Matthew Ar-

nold, William Morris, and H. G. Wells have done in England — is to bring, not peace, but a sword. With Heine the warfare was between philistinism and enlightenment, with Nietzsche between master-morality and slave-morality, with Matthew Arnold between Hebraism and Hellenism, with Morris between machinery and handicraft, with Wells between muddleheadedness and fine thinking. There are five distinct conceptions of good and five distinct conceptions of evil. And each of these pairs of opposed catchwords stands for a conceivable interpretation of society, a cleavage in things like the cleavage of the Red Sea. Accept them or not as you choose, they go down so deep that you can walk with dry feet between them.

To this happy excitement of urgent issues is due the happy excitement of European thought, the muscular and earthy sense of opposition under which personality becomes aware of itself and grows with a certain richness. I do not know how much dull pain, poverty, and chagrin are responsible for these

manifestations of high pressure: but certainly it is a pressure of this kind which forces the European to define his position, to form his own microcosm, and by virtue of which the catchwords that correspond with issues defined really represent something and are apt, relatively speaking, to cut deep. And certain it is that while European literature grows ever closer and denser and grapples to life more and more, American literature grows only windier and windier. You will find in H. G. Wells, for example, what seems at times as irresponsible a mysticism as that of any American. But while the American tendency is to begin in the air and remain in the air, you will scarcely find a European thinker who has not earned his right to fly by serving an apprenticeship with both feet on the ground; — if he leaves the earth it is because he has been pressed from it and he carries flesh and blood and clods of earth with him. You cannot have too much mysticism; but on the other hand you cannot have enough good human mud for ballast. The pressure which actu-

ates the European mind is due no doubt to a vast deal of dull pain, poverty, and chagrin. But are we Americans very much happier? In America, I think, pain, poverty, and chagrin are at last very nearly as imminent as elsewhere, and so far we have devised no compensation for them.

Self-fulfillment is the immemorial compensation for having eaten of the fruit of good and evil, and under the conditions of modern life self-fulfillment has to be a somewhat artificial thing. In a world of instincts blunted by trade, system, and machinery, the sweat of the brow, the resurgence of the seasons, the charm of perfect color and of pure form are not for the generality of men sufficient. The exhilarating sense of conflict and of rest from conflict which together make up the meaning of life, no longer universally possible on the plane of instinct, have largely come to exist in the more contagious, the more gregarious, the more interdependent world of the intelligence. In that world the majority are lost and astray unless the tune has been

set for them, the key given them, the lever and the fulcrum put before them, the spring of their own personalities touched from the outside.

In the midst of the machine age, as everybody knows, it was the contagious personality of William Morris which opposed the ideal of craftsmanship to the ideal of cheapest work and largest money and substituted for the inhumane stimulus of competition the humane stimulus of fellowship. No doubt this was only a drop in the bucket. But, speaking relatively, picture to yourself what might have been the inner mind even of the average artisan — to adopt the method of patent-medicine advertising — Before and After the William Morris treatment. One contagious personality, one clear shadowing forth of opposed issues — a good and an evil, a humane and an inhumane — touched the spring of personality in how many workingmen! and gave them how rich and how adequate a reason to turn over this world of ours, as a spade turns over a clod of earth.

It is of no use to talk about Reform. Society will be very obedient when the myriad personalities that compose it have, and are aware that they have, an object in living.

How can one speak of progress in a people like our own that so sends up to heaven the stench of atrophied personality? How can one speak of progress in a people whose main object is to climb, peg by peg, up a ladder which leads to the impersonal ideal of private wealth? How can the workingman have any reality or honesty of outlook when he regards his class merely as an accidental, temporary group of potential capitalists? And the university man — the man, that is to say, who has had the fullest opportunity to seek and find a disinterested end in living, an end to which the machinery of self-preservation however compelling remains yet in subservience — the man who has within him a world of ineffectual dreams and impotent ideals — what has he to actuate him but a confused and moralized instinct that somehow he must make a lot of money?

It is not a question of blame. You cannot blame the individual, even as a citizen, though as a citizen he overtly upholds the conception of society which is responsible for his helplessness as an individual. His personality, his latent energies go to waste just as the personalities of so many artisans would have gone to waste if there had been no William Morris. The way has not been made straight for him, the waters of the sea of good and evil have not been divided for him; he flounders in the mud and the waves, until at last, if he is exceptionally fortunate, he drowns in a million dollars. It is the economic individualist himself who blames people; socialism has the charity of science.

III

Issues which really make the life of a society do not spring spontaneously out of the mass. They exist in it — a thousand potential currents and cross-currents; but they have to be discovered like principles of science, they have almost to be created like

works of art. A people is like a ciphered parchment which has to be held up to the fire before its hidden significances come out. Once the divisions that have ripened in a people have been discerned and articulated, its beliefs and convictions are brought into play, the real evils that have been vaguely surmised spring into the light, the real strength of what is intelligent and sound becomes a measurable entity. To cleanse politics is of the least importance if the real forces of the people cannot be engaged in politics; and they cannot be so engaged while the issues behind politics remain inarticulate.

In spite of their frequent show of strength and boldness no ideas in America are really strong or bold,— not because the talents are wanting but because the talents and the mass have not been brought into conflict. No serious attempt has been made to bring about the necessary contraposition of forces, to divine them, to detach them, to throw them into relief; the real goats and the real sheep have not been set apart. There has not in

fact been one thinker strong enough to create a resisting background in the vague element of American life.

To create this resisting background must be the first work for our thinkers. It is incomparably difficult, for it is like standing on clouds and attempting to gain purchase for a lever. The vast, vague movements of sentiment in the democracy directly produce the conventionality of our ideas, for there is no clinch in things, nothing to brace the feet against, no substance against which ideas can assume a bold relief. "To preserve the freedom of the will in such expansion," says Victor Hugo (who had reason to know), "is to be great;" and certainly the man who can throw American life into relief will be a man out of ninety million.

But how shall we know him when he comes? — we who have invented the phrase "any old thing," we whose watchword has always been "just about as good," we who delight in plausible mediocrity and are always ready with tinkling cymbals to greet the

sounding brass? To leave behind the old Yankee self-assertion and self-sufficiency, to work together, think together, feel together, to believe so fervently in the quality of standards that we delight in prostrating our work and our thoughts before them — all that is certainly in the right direction. "My belief becomes indefinitely more certain to me as soon as another shares it" is the true catholic observation of a German poet, which all good Americans ought to ponder; for intimate feeling, intimate intellectual contact, even humor — that rich, warm, robust and all-dissolving geniality which never, I think, quite reached the heart of Mark Twain — it is these we chiefly lack. These are the enemies of that base privateness which holds the string of what we call publicity; these promote that right, free, disinterested publicity which the real gentleman, the real craftsman, the real civil servant has always had in his blood.

Socialism flows from this as light flows from the sun. And socialism is based on

those three things in the world which, of all things, have the most dignity — hunger, science, and good will. Is it "against human nature"? The foolish socialist laughs in his sleeve when he hears this, convinced as he is that human nature is the sport of circumstance and that when the time is right human nature will fall in line as the trees fall in line through the process of the seasons. Only the foolish socialist stops there. To be a sheer determinist is in all probability to have behind one the authority of the intellect. But human nature is an elusive magical thing which has the faculty of submitting its intellect to all manner of sea-changes. Determinism, which at one moment appears to enslave man, may at the next become the slave of man. There is a free will within determinism by which, as it were, men can cheat nature, convincing themselves — and with a whole heart — that what nature wills is what they will: and if they will it enough, which is master of the situation? We Americans ought to know, for we have produced

one of the greatest of determinists, and one of the greatest of all transmuters of determinism:

"My foot is tenoned and mortised in granite,
I laugh at what you call dissolution,
And I know the amplitude of time.

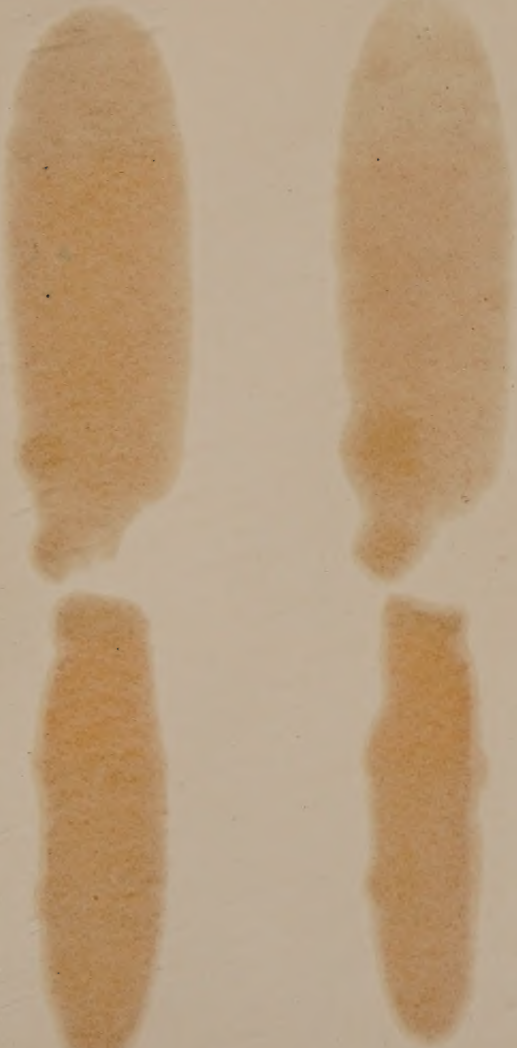
All forces have been steadily employed to complete
and delight me;
Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul."

IV

All Americans are good — this to me is an axiom; but we are good as the Germans used to be a hundred years ago, as good, that is, as bread which is baked without yeast. We are good and we are humble. We have so schooled ourselves in humility that nobody in the world more carefully, more steadily (and more unjustly) takes down our pretensions than the educated American. In the end it may be our humility that saves us. But the acquisition of culture and the acquisition of money — "Highbrow" and "Low-

brow"— are equally impersonal, equally extraneous to the real matter, equally incapable of arousing the one thing needful. When the women of America have gathered together all the culture in the world and the men have collected all the money there is — who knows? — perhaps the dry old Yankee stalk will begin to stir and send forth shoots and burst into a storm of blossoms. Strange things happen. I have heard of seeds which, either planted too deep or covered with accretions of rubble, have kept themselves alive for generations until by chance they have been turned up once more to the friendly sun. And after all humanity is older than Puritanism.

THE END



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